



W. Linn

—

1893

EXPOSITORY LECTURES AND SERMONS

EXPOSITORY LECTURES
AND
SERMONS

BY
W. GRAY ELMSLIE, M.A., D.D.

EDITED BY A. N. MACNICOLL

London
HODDER AND STOUGHTON
27, PATERNOSTER ROW

MDCCCXCII

CONTENTS.

LECTURES.

	PAGE
I.	
GIDEON	3
II.	
SAMSON	21
III.	
SAMUEL	36
IV.	
HOSEA	54
V.	
JOEL	74
VI.	
HABAKKUK	95
VII.	
ZECHARIAH	113

SERMONS.

I.	
THE INCARNATE WORD	137

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”—I JOHN i. 1-4.

II.

THE INHERITANCE OF GOOD AND EVIL	150
--	-----

"I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments" (or, bringing out the real meaning better: "Showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me, and keep My commandments").—EXOD. xx. 5, 6.

III.

THE CRIME AND THE CURSE OF CAIN	164
GENESIS iv.	

IV.

THE FIELD OF THE SLUGGARD	178
-------------------------------------	-----

"By the field of the sluggard I was passing, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. It was all grown over with briars, the face of it was covered with nettles, and the stone fence was in gaps; and I gazed and pondered deeply [literally, I fixed my heart on it; I studied it to take warning.] A snatch of sleep, a snatch of slumber, a snatch of folding the hands to repose, and striding comes thy ruin and thy poverty like a weaponed warrior."—PROV. xxiv. 30-34.

V.

A ROYAL PROCLAMATION	192
PSALM ci.	

VI.

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED	205
PSALM xlix.	

VII.

THE COMPLAINING LABOURERS	217
-------------------------------------	-----

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about

the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."—MATT. xx. 1-16.

VIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD 230

"Jesus began to speak to them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandman a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our's. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others."—MARK xii. 1-9.

IX.

LIFE AND DOCTRINE	245
-----------------------------	-----

"Take heed unto thyself and unto thy doctrine. Continue in these things, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."—1 TIM. iv. 16.

X.

"NOT YOUR OWN"	257
--------------------------	-----

"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."—1 COR. vi. 19, 20.

XI.

PERENNIAL CHRISTIAN GRACES	266
--------------------------------------	-----

"Rejoice evermore ; pray without ceasing ; in everything give thanks ; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."—1 THESS. v. 16-18.

SUNDAY READINGS.

- I. Read Psalm lxx., and Rev. iv.
REJOICE EVERMORE.
- II. Read Gen. xviii., and John xvii.
PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.
- III. Read Psalm cvii., and Heb. xii. 1-13.
IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS.
- IV. Read Psalm viii., and 2 Cor. vi.
THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS CONCERN-
ING YOU.

XII.

FORGIVENESS AND FEAR	284
--------------------------------	-----

PSALM cxxx.

XIII.

THE VEILED GLORY OF GOD	295
-----------------------------------	-----

EXODUS xxxiii.

LECTURES.

I.

GIDEON.

THE story of that great Hebrew judge Gideon is the subject of this lecture ; but before taking up his brief career, I ought to deal with two or three questions that grow out of the general subject of the conquest of Canaan by the children of Israel. The Hebrews, expelled by oppression from Egypt, lived a nomad and pastoral life for a number of years in the Sinaitic wilderness, probably with Kadesh as their centre. Apart from their religious character, they must have been very much like the Bedouin tribes : fierce, warlike, and civilised in a very poor way, but not accustomed to agriculture, to the tillage of the soil, to vintage, or olive-growing. At a certain point a strange spirit moves those Hebrew Bedouins. They unite together. They approach a fertile, cultivated country—Canaan. They have a succession of battles ; they seize the country, settle in the farms, vineyards, and homesteads ; ultimately and completely they dispossess the old tenants.

What shall we say as to the moral character of this transaction ? Was the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrews morally justifiable, achieved as it was through the violence, bloodshed, and cruelty with which war has blackened the face of our world as far

back as our eyes can see and our ears can hear? We must not let our affection or veneration for old traditions blind us to the difficulty of the question. But common sense has suggested to me one or two considerations. First of all, our judgment is apt to be prejudiced here, because men in our time, we English people in particular, have come to think rather falsely about war. A profounder apprehension of the lovely Christlike spirit of our religion, coupled with a good many less worthy influences, such as the peaceableness and security of our seagirt life in these isles, have all combined to give us a great horror of war; not because of the sin and iniquity of it, but because it means wounds and bloodshed, and robbery of our property, and death.

Now indubitably every rational man will say that, were our world free from selfishness and sin, war could not exist in it. Therefore it has its roots in iniquity. Nevertheless, like many other things that are evils in themselves, war may be used, under God's providential government of the world, to cure worse evils, acting remedially like the surgeon's knife, and bringing renewed life to the nation and the individual. And a careful and conscientious study of history, I am able honestly to tell you, does go to show that, in the long run, the outcome of the strife and bloodshed which we lament so much in the course of human history has not been the increase of the worst kinds of human misery. Over and over again you find that God has used war for the furtherance of righteousness and purity, and moral and religious progress.

In the second place, I wish to add another consideration. I venture to say that all of us, in our historical judgment, and in our ethical and religious

teaching, probably have fallen into error, in that we overvalue mere physical human life. If anything is manifest in this world, it is that the material life counts for very little in God's sight ; that the material life is mere scaffolding, the machinery by which or the platform on which the mental, moral, and ethical life is to be built up.

All the strife of existence, all our battlings with the elements and with rivals, are educative ; they are a moral discipline, and it is for this that all else exists. Manifestly therefore it must falsify all our estimates of God's providential government of the world if at any time we conceive a selfish and inordinate regard for merely physical existence. Clearly the martyrs did nobly and well when they cared nothing for bodily torture and bodily death that they might vindicate the supremacy and grandeur of moral and religious principle. Over and over again, in the pathological history of our human race, we find that God has sacrificed millions of lives to compel men to be pure and dignified in their bodily and moral habits. Apply this to war. Though it be a scourge and an exterminator, it has nevertheless a wonderful potential force in it to produce bravery, courage, ability of every description. War may thus be used to elevate the moral and mental worth of our race. I fear it is our tendency in the present day to make too much of physical comfort and physical life. On that account we recoil unduly when God has wrought out benefit for our race as a whole through terrible trial, affliction, discipline, suffering, and self-sacrifice ; as, for example, by wars in which cruel despotisms, tyrannous, inferior, and sanguinary races, have succumbed before superior moral or mental worth.

I am afraid too we do not deal out fair measure to our predecessors. We are ready to censure these Hebrews or King David for the cruel treatment they often meted out to prisoners of war. We are apt to say that the men who did such things could not, along with such a low moral character, have possessed a lofty, pure revelation of God, or a knowledge of His character. But that is too hasty a judgment. Similarly we take a socialist book, describing life in the last generation, or in the present generation, in our England; we read the history of the horrors that produced the Factory Acts—how the wealthy capitalist lived in luxury, and grudged a diminution of his income that would have made the condition of workshops and the hours of labour such as would have averted the premature death of their operatives, of men, women, and children, until Parliament stepped in. We say those men who occupied the position of capitalists were fiends. But they were nothing of the kind; some of them were even eminent Christians. But Christianity had got into cursed blindness and ignorance on these points, and they belonged to their day and generation. At present are we so very far above them? Is it not the fact that constantly you have great outbreaks of small-pox or scarlet fever spreading death in a hundred households which are due solely to carelessly scamped work? Have we not the horrors of the East End, and the City, and so on? But are we therefore *all* bad men? Not so. We are Christians in process of growing. These are evils we are only waking up to discover, the sins we have inherited, the Canaanites we have to destroy.

If we apply the same measure to the Hebrews, we see that there was a real progress, a real working for

good in a society that, in certain moral aspects, was low and degraded. God does not demand that we should be perfect saints before He uses us to do His political, or His intellectual, or His moral, or His spiritual work in this world. He takes us as we are, as we take our little children. He teaches us the A B C and the first simple rules of arithmetic. He bears with our blunders, dulness, and ignorance; and He lifts us towards Himself. How have I a right to say that, because there was a great deal of cruel human passion, of mere selfishness and greed, in the hearts of those Hebrews when they conquered Canaan, there nevertheless was nothing loftier? There was something very much loftier; there was the sense of having the true God with them, and of taking possession of a kingdom for Him on the earth. Why have I a right to say that? Because, in spite of all their iniquity and degeneracy, they never did sink down to the level of the old Canaanites. Their God was the one true God. He it was who was associated with them. That is what some of our apologists are afraid to say, and what infidels fling at our sacred history as a scoff; *viz.*, that God was associated with men who were at a low level both in worship and morals. But He was with them nevertheless; He was working with them. The sin, the degradation of the nations who possessed false gods, or had lost the old teaching of the real, living God, was manifested in this, that they dragged their gods down to their own level, and made them in their own likeness. Conversely, it was the glory and the salvation of the Hebrews, this backsliding, sensual people, that their God gained greater power and ascendancy over them with time. His perfect righteousness and love shone

out upon and in them. He lifted them to His level ; they did not drag Him down to theirs.

Then again, as a matter of fact, the God that made our world has made this law, that wherever sin of a certain type and degree has come in, the retribution of moral obliquity and degradation has come in also, in the shape of annihilation at the hands of a superior race. That seems a cruel, hard thing ; but nevertheless so it is. Moreover, to make it more mysterious, the conquering race is not always a superior race in the perfect sense. But we have not that complication here, for all old history testifies that the most blighting curse of false religion and the vilest sensuality of our world in those days lay in the religion of those Canaanites. Even classic, pagan writers say that blank atheism would have been better than that. Wherever Phœnicians established their colonies and their places of worship they introduced nameless vices and uncleannesses, and dignified them with the name of religion. And where these things were introduced they spread, so much so that the end of the great Roman Empire was hastened, its old martial strength was rooted out, by the corruption that came in a direct line from that old Canaanitish religion. To justify what was done therefore, we do not need to say that the conquerors were perfect and immaculate. All we need to be able to say is, that it was a deserved retribution, and that it was better for our world that Canaan should pass into the hands of the Hebrew nation, which has done the grandest moral and religious work for the world.

Further, the ideal, the impulse that stirred those Hebrews in the desert to go in the name of their God and take possession of that land involved the exter-

mination of many of the inhabitants and much that was found there. They were utterly to destroy the luxuries, furniture, and machinery of that false religion. And as it was religion which at that time possessed practically all the wealth of the country, there was a tremendous destruction of property when Baal worship was done away with. Nevertheless the Israelites did not utterly annihilate the old population, because they were not able. Why were they not able? Probably because of the physical conditions, the nature of the country, which impeded military operations, the strength of the fastnesses, and so forth.

But the fact that the conquest of Canaan and the extermination of the people was only partially accomplished proved an invaluable discipline to the Hebrews. In the third chapter of the book of Judges, it is said that God providentially ordered it so. They were not allowed to settle down peacefully and to become prosperous colonists at once, but were compelled to acquire the art of war, which they would not have acquired without such discipline being put upon them. From the subject Canaanites, too, they learned agriculture, and how to keep the country in fertility. Highest of all, the presence of these aliens was a moral and religious discipline to them.

There is a prevalent theory that the Hebrews got possession of the country, not by a great war or conquest, but rather by stratagem, by alliances, by treaties, and by inter-marriage. I do not believe in that theory; it is just the play of *Hamlet* with the part of Hamlet left out. How can you explain Old Testament history, how can you understand the Psalms, ringing as they do with pride and exultation, except

on the supposition that the Israelites' memory of that great time when, under Moses and Joshua, God wrought such magnificent deeds for His people, and when Israel achieved such repute in the world's history, is accurate in the main?

Another thing is perfectly certain. The Hebrews could not have achieved that enormous feat of the subjection of Canaan, with its walled towns, even in the imperfect fashion in which they did achieve it, unless they had been welded together by some great enthusiasm. Now people living a nomadic life for any length of time rarely possess any intense consciousness of national unity. The only possible explanation of the triumph of Israel therefore is that the people were possessed by an extraordinary amount of zeal for a God that had revealed Himself in a new and startling fashion. I cannot account for Old Testament history without that absolute certainty. Now such a belief may have been rough, if you like, savage, gross, unrefined, and far removed from the spirit of Christ in its inner essence. Nevertheless nothing but a firm conviction that one great supreme God had come, and was going to work on earth, compelling them to be His soldiers and servants in achieving a career of resplendent triumph in the world's history, could have made this nation do what it did. Undoubtedly that belief inspired the soul of Moses, of Joshua, and of the army that, under him, conquered Canaan.

But when the war was over, the people settled down side by side with the Canaanites. In some cases they inhabited the same towns, which thus became half Canaanitish and half Hebrew. Moreover the Hebrews, for commerce and for agriculture, were brought into

friendship with the Canaanites. Now in ancient days, all transactions, either in commerce or in agriculture, involved the performance of religious rites on both sides. But it must often have happened that a Canaanitish shrine was nearer than Jehovah's altar, and the temptation would be great to let one rite performed in common do for both. You see how easy it must have been for the Hebrews to adopt the religion of the Canaanites also. Further, the almost inevitable splitting up of the people into separate and detached communities, often dependent upon the Canaanitish neighbouring commune, tended also to assimilate the Hebrews to the Canaanites in life and in worship. This tendency had continually to be checked, and the Book of Judges is one continuous exhibition of God's providential prevention of the destruction of true religion. From it we gain a last argument in defence of the Hebrew conquest. Jehovah deals with His chosen people precisely as He dealt with the heathen in that case. Whenever the Hebrew conquerors amid their Canaanite vassals had become supine, when their relation to Jehovah had grown slack, and their religious enthusiasm feeble, when selfishness, comfort, and luxury were their supreme ends in life, they in their turn became weak; the Philistines and their other enemies fell upon them, made forays into their land, seized parts of it, until by misery they were compelled to return to their loyalty and to their God, Jehovah. Read the Song of Deborah, and you will see that very principle enunciated.

I have now, I think, said quite enough on the preliminary question to enable me to tell the story of Gideon and bring out its historical, moral, and religious wealth of meaning.

Israel had fallen into a condition of lassitude, sensuality, and impotence. The Midianites, Bedouins of the desert east of the Jordan, saw their advantage, and, commencing in a small way, pushed their forays farther and farther into the land. Israel, too selfish, too detached and broken up to combine together in order to resist those forays, became subject to them township by township. Instead of assuming the offensive, they were compelled to stand on their defence.

That was the hero's opportunity, for there are always in a healthy nation heroes lying in wait for opportunity. They do not always find it, and I think one of the most pathetic things in the world's story is that so often men of magnificent, heroic character have lived in times when they have had no chance to show it. It is a crisis that brings out what men and women really are. It is when disaster comes, and the framework of ordinary society breaks down, that you discover who is really the brave man, the pure man, and who is the man of faith. There were a great many men in Israel whose spirit was gradually moved within them, and who felt that the subjection to the Midianites was intolerable. Doubtless these men talked together, saying, "It must be God's will that Israel should be restored to its proper position." One day, in a winepress hidden out of sight, a man with a flail was threshing out his wheat. He was doing it there, sneaking out of sight lest some band of the Midianites should mark it, and see that there was a good harvest there to be stolen. As he went on with his threshing a stranger greeted him: "Jehovah be with you ; my valiant hero, my brave fellow ; God be with you !" Now can you remember a time in your

life when somebody met you, and said to you one of the common-places of life ; and, instead of responding in the usual way, you broke out upon him, fell upon him, overwhelmed with indignation and fury because of his salutation ?

That is what happened with Gideon. "God be with you!" said the stranger. Gideon flung down his flail. "God be with us? Don't talk nonsense, man! Would I be skulking in this winepress, would we Hebrews be cowering before those pagan Midianites, if God were with us? They say God was with us when we came out of Egypt, and that He did great miracles when Joshua conquered this land. Ah! if that is true, then He has gone away and left us now. Don't talk to me about God, when facts prove that there is no God with us." How do you think a modern minister of the orthodox type would have treated a man who had spoken in that fashion about God? Not as the angel treated Gideon. I fear the modern minister would have said, "Here is a most dangerous, blasphemous sceptic, all wrong in his views, full of heretical, unsettling dangerous feelings and ideas"; and he would have sought to argue with him and to put him right. What did the angel? He looked at him, knew he was wrong in blaming God in that fashion, but also that he was right to refuse to accept a religion that had lost all its nobility and bravery, that had no backbone in it. The angel said: "Go in this thy might, thy spirit that cannot tolerate this degradation of God's people, that rises against this wrong ; go thou, and be the leader in Jehovah's name, and set things right." Gideon was utterly mistaken, wicked, sinful in blaming God. But do you see, that precisely

because he could not settle down to look after his own corn while his neighbour's was being stolen, precisely because he rebelled against the customary pious phrases which cover emptiness, he was picked out to be the reformer and the deliverer of his people?

The Church would be a good deal wiser if it always took care to distinguish between the doubt of corruption and worldliness, the cold, callous, sneering doubt, and the doubt of a brave young heart that doubts because religion is so poor an affair, that doubts because of the great wrongs in the world, because of the deeds of evil that sin works, that doubts precisely because it is crying for the reality. We should go to every such man, and say: "My brother, you are not an infidel; you are called to be a religious man beyond the common. You are not an atheist. God has hold of you, and wants you for Himself. Go and do something heroic, and show that God's religion is the mightiest force. Go and demand the reality, and win a victory for God and His kingdom such as the world has never seen yet."

I have a strong impression that a century hence, or much less than that, the most believed and accepted religious historians in the Christian Church will say that in our age some of the finest religious perceptions of where God was moving, and what Christ's heart was seeking, appeared, not within the traditional Christian Churches, but outside, and in the form of rebellion against accepted wrongs, the usages and worship of the world, and the selfishness, the actual sins, and the curses of our time and of our age. I am glad it should be so. It makes me feel that God's Church and God's kingdom is a vast deal wider than

the religious statistics of London, for which I have not much respect, would make it to be.

This Book of Judges is a history put together from grand old stories told by father to son for generations in Canaan. Therefore there are various versions combined together, and there are things in them that are poetical and exaggerated. But I think that Gideon's story, as we have it, as it has existed for many centuries, has in it a unique power to supply stimulus and inspiration to noble-hearted young men and maidens. For see how the story goes on. Gideon has had his discontent, his complaint against God suddenly revolutionised and turned into a Divine call to do something heroic ; and the man's soul responds to it. The next thing that flashes into his soul, with the voice and power and majesty of God in it, is this, that he now comprehends that it is not God's slackness after all, but want of zeal on the part of the Israelites, their own moral degradation, their own disloyalty, that had brought them into the state they were in. "How could we Hebrews," he would say, "conquer those Midianites, while we were worshipping gross Baals and the gods of this mountain, and forgetting our own God, Jehovah?" And so the voice of God came to this man of valour, and said : "Begin at home. Set yourself right, and be quite sure that God will soon set the world right." That is the kind of thing I should like to see in many showy preachers and reformers, orthodox and unorthodox. They would do a great deal more for the regeneration of the world, if they would set their own characters and homes right.

The voice of God said to Gideon : "You are to be Israel's leader. You cannot be a leader until you do something that will make men feel that you have a

right to command them. The real curse in Israel now is this Baal worship. In your father's own town there is an altar to Baal. Go and break down that altar and desecrate it, and set up an altar to Jehovah there." That night Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal, built an altar to Jehovah, and on it offered sacrifice to the true God. The next morning the population were roused to fury. Some little boy who saw the thing done said, "It was Gideon." And so Gideon and his father had to go and face the enraged populace. The Jehovah worshippers were very lukewarm. Gideon and his father stood very much alone. But the latter had a very shrewd head. When he heard that Gideon must be put to death, the old man stepped forward, and said: "Who are you that are going to be guilty of such sacrilege? An insult has been offered to great Baal, the god of light and thunder and fire; and *you* are going to take up his cause. *You* are going to put a man to death. He will be very angry with you: he means to do that himself. This god, surely he will avenge himself! I warn you, that the man who steals a march upon that god, as if he could not defend himself, angers him; he will be a dead man before night. Let Baal defend himself. Let Baal strike the man that has injured him." The people all felt that this was very true, and they simply did this. They all looked on Gideon, and said, "Before to-morrow morning he will die a horrible death;" and they gave him the name of Jerubbaal, *i.e.*, the man that is going to fight against Baal, the man that has Baal for his antagonist, the man doomed to Baal's wrath. What happened? Nothing, and Gideon henceforth stood out as a possible bulwark of the people.

He had done a daring, a tremendous deed in the name of Jehovah. He had struck down Baal's altar, and the weak-kneed were all watching. "Will Baal avenge himself?" they asked. Baal did not, and it then appeared that Gideon had struck a blow at the superstitious worship of Baal. From that day he was a marked man. He stood out as Jehovah's champion, and was now in a position to put himself forward in a crisis.

Presently the Midianites came against Israel in great force, and Gideon blew the war trumpet. He was soon encamped upon some post of vantage in the pass by which the Midianites were going to force their way. The Midianites numbered about 135,000, perhaps not so many; the Hebrews nearly 32,500. That is to say, the Hebrews were utterly outnumbered. In a situation like that the only hope of victory is by stratagem, and stratagem does not need quantity of soldiers, it needs quality. Every man must have his wits about him and be no coward. Therefore Gideon thinned out his army, and as everybody afraid or half-hearted had to retire from the critical scene, the bulk of his army disappeared; 22,000 men went away. He is left with 10,000 men. That is far too many for stratagem. They are all plucky fellows, but they may not all be clever fellows. He wants both courageous and capable men. He adopted a simple expedient. He had them drink. The majority of them unbuckled their swords and eased their armour, and knelt down to drink. Three hundred kept their swords on, and simply with their hands carried the water to their mouths. Gideon said to those three hundred, "You are the men I want." The men that were so eager for battle that

they did not think much about their own comfort were the three hundred. The others were good, brave men, but they had not the stuff in them that was in the three hundred.

Gideon then planned to throw the Midianite camp into a panic. He took his three hundred men, and divided them into three bands, each of one hundred. Every man took a trumpet and a pitcher, with a torch hidden in the pitcher. He arranged that each of the hundreds should approach the camp of the Midianites from a different side. On a given signal from Gideon, every man broke his pitcher, took the torch in his left hand, waved it in the night, and blew his trumpet. The Midianites, starting to their feet, rubbed their eyes in astonishment. Thinking that they were caught by a large number of Hebrew armies, they fell into utter confusion; and running against each other in the darkness, they slaughtered each other. Those who survived were disorganised and soon took to flight, Gideon following them in hot pursuit. He, with his own chosen followers, his three hundred, took one particular course. But it was impossible for him with this small number to complete his victory, and merely to have dispersed the Midianites was not much of a triumph. The work is not half done: he must exterminate them. To accomplish this he gives the order to the men of Ephraim to intercept the Midianites. The Ephraimites do so, while Gideon is pursuing the main body, and the victory gained was complete. But on the return of the various bodies of his troops, there was a natural risk that the conquerors would fall out and fight among themselves. The smaller-minded among Gideon's men would meet the late

comers with the taunt : " You cowards, you laggards, you left us to do it all ! " The reply was naturally a hot accusation against Gideon that he had not called the Ephraimites sooner because he wished to have all the glory for himself. But Gideon had a shrewd head : he was his father's son ; and so he only looked at them and said : " What are you talking about ? You say we have got the best of the glory and honour ? Not at all. Look at the enormous slaughter you have inflicted on the enemy, and you have captured the two leaders, the two princes. It is true that at first we took the vintage ; but in this case the gleanings are far greater, bigger, and more glorious than the vintage." The historian enjoys that in the way he puts it : " Then their anger was abated toward him when he had said that." Gideon knew human nature, and his conduct here is a very useful study for those who have to lead and rule even Christian men.

The whole story of Gideon seems contrived to reveal human character. We learn from it how good work is to be done in the face of difficulties. The recreant men in his army, and the men of Succoth and Penuel, were doing their best to prevent his work being done ; but, in spite of difficulty, Gideon did a great deal of good work. Gideon had the Divine vocation, but do you think he was always sure of it ? No ; for when the crisis came, he asked God to give him superstitious signs. That is a bad thing in Gideon. The second time he said, " O God, be not angry." What right had he to demand physical portents and marvels to make sure that he was doing God's work ? It is the sight of God's face, the love of His voice, the holy influence of His

Spirit that alone can uplift men. It is the weakness of men's faith that makes them demand miracles. But God takes them even with their superstition, their weakness, their defects, and works great things by them, if only they be true to the light they have. That is the lesson of Gideon's life. There was much primitive grossness in his conception of religion, of war, and of government. Nevertheless the central, sovereign, animating power in the man's soul was an absolute conviction that whatever came he would do the will of the one true, righteous God of heaven and of earth. That made his career glorious ; for in so doing he was faithful to the highest light he had access to.

II.

SAMSON.

THE story of Samson confronts us with a most difficult theme. How comes this reckless, sinning man to be reckoned among the heroes of God? In assigning him such a place, I confess that sacred history raises difficulties which I am unable completely to solve. On the one hand, I see clearly that, in estimating the career of a man like Samson, we are apt to be influenced by unreasonable scruples. We have no right to judge him by the standards of the Christian conscience, or to settle beforehand what use God may make of a man like him in His government of the world. But, on the other hand, there is much in Samson's history which we find hard to reconcile with the character of a great and good man, and with the presence and controlling power of the Spirit of God in his life.

I shall run over the outstanding events in Samson's career, so that we may be in a position to estimate its ethical and spiritual significance, and to see if there is not good reason for endorsing the verdict of Scripture, and assigning him a place among the heroes of the Old Testament. A godly mother receives a Divine warning that a child is to be born who is destined in God's purpose to play a great part

in the history of His chosen people. She is enjoined to bring up the child as one set apart for God's service. In token of this, he is to keep his hair uncut, and is to be bound by the vow of abstinence from wine and strong drink and from forbidden foods, especially meats employed in the worship of heathen gods. The child is born, grows up to maturity, and, we are told, the Spirit of God begins to stir his soul within him.

Then comes the story of his love for a Philistine maiden, and his determination to wed her, in spite of the remonstrance of his parents. On the way to visit his promised bride he encounters and slays a lion. The episode suggests a riddle, which he propounded to the Philistine youths. Samson loses his bet through their treachery. This incident stirs into activity his hidden hostility to the Philistines, and he determines on revenge. We note in the revenge which he exacted on this occasion the grim humour that characterises all his dealings with the Philistines. He accomplishes his bloody reprisals in a spirit of sardonic gaiety, and comports himself very much as a practical joker. He subsequently abandoned his bride in disgust, and her parents gave her to another man. This is the story of Samson's first exploit against the Philistines.

Then comes the second. The Philistines resolved to capture their formidable foe, and enlist the services of the craven-hearted Judæans over whom they had so long tyrannised. These men of Judah went to the stronghold where Samson was, to bind him and deliver him into the hand of the Philistines. "Bind me," said Samson, "and hand me over to my enemies; all I ask is that you will not traitorously

put me to death yourselves." The thing is done, and he is brought away. The Philistines give a shout of triumph when they see him. But the Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon him, and he snaps, as if they were burnt flax, the new ropes with which he had been bound. Then, seizing the jawbone of an ass that lay to hand, he falls upon the Philistines, who were filled with superstitious dread at such a portent of strength, and with this frail weapon destroys a thousand men. Mark again the jovial spirit, the rollicking humour, with which he celebrates his exploit. "With the jawbone of an ass I have killed a mass of men ; with the jawbone of an ass I have smitten a thousand men." This is the story of his second exploit.

And then comes the third. Samson becomes entangled in an intrigue with a loose woman at Gaza. His enemies quietly dispose themselves, expecting to seize him as he makes his way out of the town in the morning. But Samson rises in the middle of the night, and, in that jesting humour of his, takes hold of the brazen gates of the city, lifts them clean out, with the posts in which they are placed, carries them to the top of a neighbouring hill, and leaves them there. This, of course, adds to their resentment against him, and helps to bring about the crisis in which he perished.

The story of Samson's last exploit against the Philistines is as follows. Again he forms a degrading attachment to a courtesan, an attachment which takes possession of his whole nature. The woman was a heartless traitoress, and proved a ready instrument of the Philistines, who, by bribes and threats, induced her to win from Samson the secret

of his supernatural strength. She exerts all her wiles for this end. At first Samson resists, but at length he is undone, and reveals the Divine secret. Samson is betrayed and taken prisoner. He is carried away, helpless, to gaol. His eyes are put out, manacles are fastened on him ; he is chained to the handle of a great millstone, and compelled to do the work of the most menial slaves, to grind in the prison-house. In this dark dungeon, with the light of day clean gone for ever, he lies imprisoned. Meantime, the Philistines—all the nobles, priests, and magnates of every description—gather themselves into the chief temple of their god, Dagon, to celebrate with due magnificence their triumph over the downfall of the hero of Jehovah. In the midst of their revelry, the idea occurs to some one of having out the blinded Samson. No sooner said than done ; and while they perpetrate all sorts of cruel jests upon him, and exult in their victory over his God and himself, the sense of revived strength seems to take possession of him. In one last determined desire to do something for his God and his people, he bids his guide lead him to the two central pillars on which the great roof of the temple, covered with people, was supported, and drags the pillars down, and buries the pride and flower of the Philistine nation with himself in one common ruin.

Such is the story. All thoughtful and candid students of the Bible feel that it is an extraordinary narrative, with features that differentiate it from the rest of Old Testament history. There are elements in it that remind us strangely of Greek and Roman mythology. Accordingly a great many scholars conclude that it is simply a myth ; that these weird

and picturesque stories of gigantic strength depict the operations of the sunshine, as, for example, in the burning of the corn. In confirmation, they point out that Samson's name, in Hebrew, means "the sunny one." I, for one, do not believe this, and the best scholars, even the most unbelieving of them, reject this view. The story is too real and life-like to be treated in such a fashion. Besides, there are in it far greater divergencies from Greek mythology than there are real affinities.

Others, again, say that this is manifestly a real story, though with much poetical exaggeration, and with no religious purport, of a rough, lustful man who fought the Philistines. On the other hand, the Bible history states that Samson fought for God and righteousness, for the progress of God's kingdom on earth, and assigns him a place in the grand procession of those who prepared the way for Jesus Christ. Either a New Testament writer is mistaken, or else it is we who are blind and wanting in insight if we fail to find in Samson's history solid ground for maintaining that, in spite of all his imperfections, he did, in his way and with his gifts, perform the work that built up true religion, and helped forward the progress of God's kingdom, and prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ. That there are difficulties, I own; but for myself I feel justified in saying that I can perfectly comprehend how a place in the roll of Old Testament heroes is assigned to Samson by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The God of the Bible is no abstract creation of human thought. He is the God that made this strange earth, with its animals that prey on one another, its earthquakes and tempests and floods;

the God of life and of death, who made love and joy, but also worked into His design sin, disease, and death ; the God that made human intellect, capacity, and skill, but that also left man to fight his own way through the world, and to learn through his blunders and errors ; the God that does not supply everything ready made, but that gives us eyes and minds and hearts and consciences, and the material to use them on. Just as we must work out for ourselves the better form of government and the more perfect social order, so it is better for us to seek the truth than to get it without effort, to fight our own battles, and to rise above our sins to self-conquest and self-devotion. And the loftiness of character men reach so is all the greater, because the soul of it is humility—the tenderness of penitence and gratitude for sin forgiven. With such a conception of God's discipline of men, I do not find it so hard to fit this brave-hearted—yea, this lustful Samson, into God's work in our world.

The Bible judgment of sins is very different from ours. We make distinctions which it does not recognise. When I take my New Testament, I find in the list of deadly sins, classed in equal terms, murder, adultery, fornication, love of money, lying, hard-heartedness, pride, vainglory, hypocrisy. We should be more tender and charitable than we are when we find the lives of great and noble men marred by sins for which we choose to excommunicate them, and more humble and lowly in our own claim to be ourselves servants of God and soldiers of Christ. If you admit these to be true positions, then I ask you to read the story of Samson in the light of them.

Two things stand out in the narrative of Samson's career, as compared with the history of, at least the majority, of the other judges. (1) The other judges fight God's battles with the people at their backs. They simply give aid and point to a sense of rising strength, of impatience of subjection, of reviving national pride and religious zeal in the Hebrew people. Samson, on the contrary, stands utterly alone, fights his battle single-handed, is supported by no enthusiasm for the national cause, and not even by common loyalty on the part of his own comrades. (2) The other judges are chosen to their office as mature men, but Samson is set apart to his career as an unborn child. From his very infancy the sense of his vocation takes possession of him; as child and boy and youth, it is making and moulding him, and preparing him for what he is to be. The explanation of these two characteristic features of his history, which distinguish it from that of the other judges, lies in this, that Samson's lot in life fell upon a period of utter national demoralisation.

As time goes on, we learn how the method of government by judges broke down in Israel, and was abandoned for government by a king. Its utter inefficiency was manifested by the condition of apathy into which Israel had now fallen. They had lapsed into subjection to the despised, uncircumcised Philistines. All national spirit was dying out, and the prestige of Jehovah was giving way before the prestige of Dagon. Jehovah's people are a conquered, tax-paying, Philistine-ridden race. Dagon is triumphant over Jehovah; he is the strong god, Jehovah the weak God. Now the only hope for the redemption of a society that has fallen into a condition of

such lassitude, mental and moral, lies in the creation of a fresh and powerful personality. All through the world's history you find that, when a people's life has fallen into the mire and become impotent, its recovery begins in the sudden meridian of a great personality. Indeed, just because God is in human history, such periods seem to produce, as it were, by an inevitable reaction, their own remedies; just as the blighting curse of strong drink is met and fought by the other extreme of total abstinence. So in Samson's time, when the social order, resting on specially selected and temporary judges, had broken down, and religion and patriotism were dwindling and dying out, the popular life produced, by way of recoil, two extraordinary phenomena. The first was the order of the Nazarites; the second, the order of the prophets. Samson represented the Nazarite, Samuel the prophet. Mark the significance of the Nazarite. The religious conception of Israel in its relation to God was that the whole people were God's body on earth. He dwelt among them, lived in them, wrought through them. But the mass of the people were utterly incapable of realising such an ideal, and the presence of God in Israel became concentrated in and represented by certain orders of men—the priests, the prophets, the Nazarites. Those three religious orders run all through Hebrew history. The Nazarites were ascetics—the total abstainers, the religious fanatics of the times. They kept their hair uncut, as the external mark of their consecration to God. In protest against those habits of luxury and self-indulgence that led by a natural tendency into Baal-worship, they abstained from the produce of the grape, and indeed, in many cases, denounced the culture of the

grape. They occupied precisely the same position which the total abstainer occupies among ourselves. The Nazarites represented, in all the great epochs of Hebrew history, the inevitable and salutary (salvatory) recoil from irreligion and immorality.

To return to the story of Samson. If there is any hope for Israel in its present condition of moral and religious apathy, it lies in the appearance and power of a great and strong personality. For the most part, society moves on without consciousness of the primitive forces. It lives at second hand, on what has been won for it. And while it has still vitality and manhood enough to make it capable of being stirred by some lofty enthusiasm, at such a time its awakened spirit can possess a man, and mould and transform him, and shape him to be its leader and exponent. This is the story of the other judges, who were carried forward on such a tide of national enthusiasm. When, however, society has become so emasculated, paralysed, and impotent as to be incapable of a large, general enthusiasm, this happens: God, who is ever caring and working for social progress, drags down into the original depths, the new forces and motive-powers that are born in the character of a man—some great religious or social reformer, or some mighty thinker, or some minister, who takes possession in the name of humanity of new forces of physical nature, and gives a new outlet to population, commerce, and industry. This is the explanation of the story of Samson. In this way he was chosen before his birth for his vocation, and shaped to fulfil it. For this reason he had to fight his battles single-handed, unsustained by any popular enthusiasm.

How, humanly speaking, was Samson prepared for

his work? To begin with, God made a cradle and a home for him. Samson's mother was a woman with a great soul and a large heart, to whom God was a reality; a woman who could not indeed fight God's battles and deliver God's people, but who lived with the upper storeys of her being in the unseen, and was possessed with a tremendous longing that there should be deliverance for Israel, that something heroic should appear in history, and that God should vindicate His might and grandeur above the heathen gods. Samson was born to a mother that longed for a boy, not that he might rise to comfort and ease, but that he might be lofty and heroic, and fight and, if need be, die for God and God's kingdom. To her son she transmits her hope, faith, and enthusiasm. Can you measure the might of a motherhood like that? Such a mother can make men saints and heroes.

Again. From a little child Samson felt something mysterious stirring in his soul, ay, and in his physical nature. True, it was through that strong flesh of his that he fell. What then? If men of majestic intellect, and splendid achievements, and noble dreams, and the power of self-sacrifice, be dragged down, stained and marred by besetting lusts and sins, are men of puny natures competent to judge such geniuses, who are exposed to extra temptation by reason of those very gifts of God that make it possible for them to do, for God and man, more than other men could do? I do not justify the sins of Samson, I simply put the question: Are we, any of us, who are doing God's work, guiltless of hypocrisy, half-heartedness, and worldliness? And shall we judge this man, who lived in another world from ours, and was exposed to strong temptations by the very qualities that made

him serviceable to his age and God? God's heroes are not spotless. God takes them, if they will take Him.

Samson needed extraordinary gifts for extraordinary work. He had, single-handed, by his own solitary prowess, to cow the Philistines and reanimate the courage of the Hebrews. Two things were needful for him: (1) extraordinary strength, (2) inextinguishable joyousness. To hold his own amid the abject depression of the people round about him, it was essential that he should be possessed of exuberant mirth and jollity. It is the men who do the most serious and earnest work that can play and romp and laugh with their children. That is not the noisy laughter of the fool.

Once again: it may be that asceticism is demanded for our age, just as Naziritism was for Samson's. But that, remember, is the bad remedy of a still worse evil. Jesus Christ was no ascetic, else His enemies would not have published, as the likeliest scandal about Him, that He was a wine-bibber.

Samson's strength came, not from his hair, but from God. "The Spirit of God came powerfully upon him." I wish we Trinitarians did believe in God's Spirit more than we do, as a living power in practical, every-day life. God's Spirit gives the clever workman his skill, and the artist his visions of beauty and technical deftness of hand. God's Spirit stirs up the brave man to do his duty, and gives the martyr courage to die unflinchingly. And God's Spirit was in those heroes of old. Does this reduce our conception of the supernatural awfulness of the processes of redemption and sanctification—the work of the Spirit of God, who convinces men of sin and renews them

again in the image of Christ? Surely not! But it brings the solemnity and sacredness of religion down into all that we call secular and common. God's Spirit is in our physical, mental, and moral life, quite as much as in our spiritual life. The supernatural of the Bible is nothing more than the natural of everyday life become articulate. Every man of real, original genius will tell you that his best thoughts, his most wonderful achievements, came to him. He was preparing, seeking, searching, trying to accomplish something, and could not. Suddenly a flash of light was cast upon him—a great wave of might lifted him out of himself and carried him away. It came to him!

The supernatural strength of Samson was undoubtedly accompanied by a proper physique. The motive-power had a strongly built engine on which to operate. But it is noteworthy that Samson is not described as a giant. He was no monster like Goliath, who had only that physical strength of which a little skill can make an end. The impression we derive from the story is that Samson was a well-made man, but not of enormous proportions. Much of his power is attributable to the character of the man: the skill, the wit, the unexpectedness of what he does, the audacity, the daring, the flash of his eye. But more than all, it is the impression he gives of supernatural power behind him, his own consciousness of the Spirit of God flashing out in all he does, the strange and weird prestige established around him, that gave him his extraordinary ascendancy over his enemies. A personality like Samson's means a perilous exposure to the entrance into him and the mastery over him of the physical forces that were

around him. No man lives his life *in vacuo*. The magnetic, emotional, passionate energy of Samson, so full of vivacity, meant for him an intensely sensitive and susceptible relation to all around that stirred the passions and forces of the flesh. A little man is saved by his littleness from the perils of a giant or a genius. All through the story, moreover, you see how God made use of Samson's lapses into sin to embroil him with the Philistines. Sin is not to be justified ; but in estimating the character of Samson, we must take account of the way in which God sometimes over-rules men's evil deed to lift them to a loftier career.

I am astonished at those rationalistic critics who mock at the story of Samson, and ridicule it as low and ignoble. If it was such a poor and vulgar affair, how came it that he occupies a place among the saints and sages of the Old Testament, and that his story is preserved while so much else is thrown aside? And how was it that every Hebrew was proud of Samson, and that he was loved more than all the other judges? Ah! there must have been something grand and noble in the man. We feel his strange attractiveness. He was such a real man; his wit, humour, irony, his very sins and weaknesses, bring him near to us. Remember how, when the Philistines demanded him, and the men of Judah made the cowardly proposition that he should give himself up to save their property from being plundered, the big-souled man replies, "Yes; make me your sacrifice." There is a touch of Samson's nobility!

But I go on to the last scene in Samson's life. Note the danger that lurked in his vocation. A virtue or a religion that rests on an extreme is unstable. His

Nazaritism exposed him to the risk of becoming presumptuous, of trusting in his external calling to be God's, and forgetting that the very core and kernel of his vocation and his power lay in his heart-loyalty to God. In this way he fell. For the love of a harlot he risked his Divine vocation. That meant that God had lost hold of him ; and so the sunny, strong, triumphant, merry Samson is in a dungeon, grinding in chains at a mill, with his eyes put out, his hair cut, and his strength gone !

Try to picture the man in the light of the tragic end of his life, and you will see much that is not rough, or rude, or vulgar. Think of that great heart, that brave soul, that man that so loved the sunshine and his liberty and his strength. Oh the degradation, the bitter remorse and upbraiding ! He did not blame Delilah ; he did not blame God ; he blamed himself, and his own reckless madness, that had flung such a great career away. And beyond all, there was the horrible dread that he had been cast off by God for ever ; no strength coming to him now in his prison ; no voice of God. Had he lost God, and the light of God, as well as the light of the sun ? Ah ! and no comfort came to him for many a long day ! He did not know it was on the way. But his hair was growing, and he was recovering, though slowly, as from a great fall. There is a way to heaven even from the very gate of hell.

The poor, blinded hero goes into that temple, stumbling, and laughed at as he stumbles ; he is jeered and mocked ; he is dazed and broken-hearted. But, I think, suddenly his ear caught that mocking song of praise to Dagon, that exalted Dagon as the conqueror of Jehovah and of Samson. And the

inspiration came to him : still his name is associated with that of Jehovah ; and they are mocking, not him, but Jehovah ! Oh ! perchance he may still reckon that he and Jehovah stand and fall together ; and perchance Jehovah counts it so too ! Suddenly there came to him, like an echo from the past, that strange movement in his soul, a sense of the Divine *afflatus*, an inspiration, a dim consciousness that his strength had returned to him : and then the swift resolve. If only he could do one deed that would undo the injury to Jehovah and Jehovah's people he had done ; ah ! if he died in doing it, perchance he would sooner die than live with his eyes put out, and the everlasting record of his shame written in his body. But to die for Jehovah and Jehovah's people ! And so he got his arms over the pillars, and a great cry went up from his great heart to God to give him power to do one thing and wipe out a shameful past. He bowed himself, dragged those pillars down, and died, surrounded by the overwhelming ruin of the pride and flower of all Philistia. Through Judah and Ephraim the story went ; every Hebrew heart was fired and worshipped Jehovah ; and the faith of Jehovah shone out. They came through the panic-stricken, cowed Philistines, and they bore his mangled remains from that ruined temple, and they laid him in the grave. And so, with all his sins, his fall and shame, but with his great repentance, and his large, brave heart, and his love and loyalty to men and to God, they wrote over his grave that he was a true man of God, and a hero of God's kingdom on earth. The Epistle to the Hebrews needs no justification in endorsing that verdict and counting Samson among God's heroes.

III.

SAMUEL.

SAMUEL is often called the last of the Judges, but whether he or Eli be so reckoned, there can be no doubt that Old Testament history counts Samuel one of the very greatest figures in its panorama of heroical and noble statesmen. Whenever in the Old Testament you find the childhood of any character that figures in the drama elaborately described, you may take it for certain that the historians consider the man so depicted to be the maker of a new epoch. The story of the infancy of Moses is a familiar example. On reading the first chapters of the Book of Samuel you will instantly receive the impression that Samuel holds a place in the history of God's chosen people probably second only to that held by Moses, the creator of Israel and the founder of Israel's religion.

The history narrated in the Book of Samuel is not written by Samuel himself. It is not even put together at the time Samuel lived or immediately after. The book is manifestly a compilation of one, two, or three older masses of tradition. We can detect differences in the language and in the description of the pervading interests, political or religious, which betray the composite origin of these

sections which, grouped together, make what we count the continuous story of Samuel. Moreover, Bible scholars are no doubt right in saying that these stories about Samuel that we possess in our book cannot be altogether reconciled to one another, as we have them. Sometimes a period in the life of Samuel is taken from one history, and then again the next from another; and we have not the proper beginnings of either narrative. Besides, one at least of these old histories has been decidedly coloured by the religious bent of the mind of the man who wrote it. He tells the story of olden days for the purpose of letting you see the workings of Providence, the designs of God. He is not content to tell you of the mere germs, the beginnings, of impulse or of aspiration. He describes the development of new ideas in the light of what has issued from them : he works them out and shows you all that was contained in those germinal springs and fountains of new life and new faith.

It is, therefore, not altogether easy to settle in our own minds with certainty what were the actual events in Samuel's life. One thing, however, we can say with perfect confidence, and that is, that it fell to him to watch the very death-throes of one great epoch of Israel's history, and to usher in a new life, a remarkable reorganisation of Israel's political and religious career. What we have deposited within the compass of Samuel's career is nothing short of the greatest revolution that took place in the story of Israel.

I must go back to the beginning of our course of lectures and ask you to recall what was the formative, the creative ideal, as later historians have worked it out for us, that shone before the eyes of Moses, and of Joshua, and of all the religious souls that were in

Israel at the time of the conquest of Canaan. The ideal was this : to take possession of a chosen, specially adapted portion of this earth's surface to be the home and seat of a people absolutely devoted to the one true God. In the face of all modern criticism and questionings, I stand by that. I cannot otherwise account for the magnificent enthusiasm and might with which those wandering, nomad tribes of the desert seized upon Palestine, getting, ultimately, full possession of the land, I cannot otherwise explain the tenacity with which they resisted all the forces that played upon them, that tended to break down their religious faith, to destroy their own peculiar national character, and to cause them to sink to the level of the old inhabitants. I cannot account for the extraordinary drama which their history presents except by the explanation that it had its deepest and ultimate root in great religious enthusiasm. It is quite possible that there was a great deal of ignorance, earthliness, fanaticism, superstition, and weakness in the mass of the people. That has been the history of the Christian Church through centuries ; it has been the condition of Christendom itself. Only the leaders, the great outstanding thinkers and believers, may have grasped the inner heart and life of their religion ; but they were able all the same to permeate the mass of the worshippers with an immense enthusiasm that stirred them to warlike deeds, which were in the designs of God, though as a mass they only half understood their religion, not having any grasp of what really lay at the heart of it.

The purpose, plan, and goal aimed at in the conquest of Canaan was to hold the land peaceably, to settle down in the farms, in the vineyards, in the

sunny homes there, and live a happy, quiet life, secure under the protection of Jehovah. The original plan, as sketched out by Moses, and held before the people by Joshua and other leaders, must, humanly speaking, have secured them that. Had they been thoroughly loyal to Jehovah and to one another, tribe standing fast by tribe; had they carried to its complete issue the task of subjugating Canaan and driving out their enemies, then probably they might have held their own without being exposed to constant attacks. They might have developed material prosperity that would have been a platform for wonderful spiritual growth and progress. But in all these points they failed utterly.

The actual fact was very different from the ideal that had brightened the soul of Moses, and that had shone before the faces of the early leaders of Israel. The Hebrews failed to take thorough possession of the land. Everywhere they left cities in the hands of the old Canaanites. Right through the middle of the country there ran a wedge of Canaanite Pagan towns. Their selfishness rapidly severed the tribes from one another. Every man looked after himself, every community lived for its own interest. It was excessively difficult at any time to get them to take any action to realise their common brotherhood under the Divine Fatherhood of Jehovah, consequently it was impossible that as a nation they could come to any good. It has always been impossible to get a people, broken into separate communities, not wedded into one great nation with a fixed authority and government and a throne held by a powerful monarch, to do anything great or magnificent in the world's history. In a crisis some great leader springs up, works upon

their fears, welds them together into a powerful army, strikes a blow that destroys a wanton invasion. Then he plans to go and crush the danger at its seat ; but that is impossible. The moment the danger is over, each tribe, regiment, community, sets off home to till their fields and make money again. And so everywhere, throughout the period of the Judges, great victories are achieved, splendid deeds are done ; but all the same there is no large conquest of territory still held in alien hands, there is no extension of Israel's sway over the surrounding powers.

How came Israel to miss its lofty destiny and to lapse into this condition of impotence and weakness, this moral and religious paralysis, that we find at the end of the period of the Judges ? No doubt it all came from its first blunder, its failure to reach the height of its Divine vocation. But that is not quite a complete account of it. Strangely enough, what of faithfulness to their high calling remained in their hearts worked most disastrously for Israel. Since they would not answer to their ideal wholly, they would have done better, humanly speaking, to cast it wholly away. For by their ineffective attachment to it the best men, the inspired religious leaders of Israel, were set against those human expedients and measures, which if adopted at the beginning of that epoch, might have given to the Hebrews a powerfully developed national unity, organisation, and government. All through that period there was a strong recoil from the idea of breaking down old tribal distinctions, a great repulsion against the idea of a king, of a centralised government ; and that dislike of a king and a kingdom had its root in their very magnificent religious ideal. They felt that it would be a declension

from the grandeur of the Israelites' calling, if between them and their God there came in any human representative or mediator. They were determined to have no visible centre of government among them. Their grand idea was to do their duty to their country and to God at the direct bidding and inspiration of Jehovah Himself. Now that was a magnificent and majestic thought, a thought which we ought to keep before us still, in political government, and, above all else, in our Church life and Church government, as well as in our own personal religion. It was a grand conception that Israel was ever to be so passionately devoted to their God, to be so keenly sensitive to the appointment of His will and wish in every emergency of their national fortunes, that they should need no human rule or government to compel them to do the right thing. It seemed a grand and glorious thing to live every day in immediate intercourse with God, and dependence on God. And if they had been able to live up to that ideal, they would have needed no king and no centralised human government. If every epoch could have produced one great heart and intellect to grasp the necessity of the time, with an arm powerful to lift the sword or the sceptre, to gather by an impulse felt everywhere, and obeyed, the whole power, manhood, soul, and heart of the people around him, then that would have been an infinitely more glorious life, more strong, more noble, more true to the ideal of God's kingdom on earth, than any earthly kingship could have given them. The Book of Judges shows us the breakdown of that lofty ideal. Israel was not noble enough to realise it; they came far short of their calling and fared worse in regard at least to the

earthly things which drew them away from it, than if they had utterly rejected it at the first.

Accordingly, instead of a nation moving like one man at the Divine impulsion towards divinely ordained ends, we find a totally different state of things. In certain great crises, powerful military dictators are raised up, who for a time unite the people together through the prestige and influence gained by their deliverance of the nation, or parts of the nation. They establish a certain not official, but moral authority and rule, and during their lifetime the land has the benefit of increased centralisation, entirely in the name of God. At their death, the old selfish dissension reappears and the same process has to be repeated, until, as years go by, the possibility of that grows less and less. And so we come to a point where, if the Hebrews are to be delivered at all, it must be done by individual men whose very personality is lifted above the ordinary natural level, men utterly consecrated to God and Jehovah in their whole soul and their whole being. Such, for example, was Samson, with all his defects. His final victory was not one of force of arms, it was a religious victory. Jehovah had showed Himself mightier than their gods. Consequently though Israel became more and more utterly impotent to hold its own, though the history of the period of the Judges is the history of a steady, persistent, material and political decline in Israel; yet underneath that external material degradation there is a gradual development in the inner kernel of loftier moral and religious life of which Samson's triumph was a sign. As you reach the end of that period in the Book of Judges, you find that moral and religious force is coming to the front.

The course of things therefore was that there arose great warriors inspired by God, and winning victories for Israel. Then, when the people are no longer fit to help themselves, you have deliverance wrought by single inspired individuals like Samson the Nazarite.

That method in its turn proved insufficient to preserve and recover the old religious and national idea. Then, as if instinctively the heart of the nation, all that is noble, living, all that has faith and fire in it, gathers round the central sanctuary; and so the next figure that appears on the scene, standing out in defence of God, is the high priest Eli at Shiloh, where the Ark of God is. Nazaritism has done its best and has come short. Now, priesthood, the professional embodiment of religion, is to have the opportunity to make its experiment, and see whether, through a priest of God Israel can reach its proper ideal. History shows us that this also failed. Then appeared another new element and force. The strange, mysterious power of the prophet takes up the work and does mighty achievements, but it too is proved incompetent, not through its fault, but through the necessities of the situation, the actual facts and conditions of the problem. But prophecy, while owning itself defeated, and while laying down its claim to be Israel's deliverer, had yet creative might in it. It evolved from its own bosom that earthly instrument, office and power, that secures for Israel the perpetuity and dignity of its national existence, which though not in itself a fulfilment of Israel's ideal, is the condition of its final fulfilment in quite undreamed-of ways.

I will now sketch the character and career of Eli and Samuel. I first take the story of Eli, to show what Samuel had to work upon in making certain

required changes. I have already given the key-ideas of the history, and need only add that Eli is one of the most unfortunate men in the Bible. I think, if he could bring an action for libel against preachers and commentators, he would get enormous damages. We are all mentally so very indolent that we do not like complicated problems. As a matter of fact most men's characters, and most men's lives, are great mixtures. One of the most fruitful sources of our blunders just lies in the fact that we cannot face the honest truth of God ; that men have got evil in them. There are some men whose will votes for the evil, and they are against God ; but there are others whose heart and will, at least, side with the good and the best, and they are making for God. These men we may find in heaven at last, if we get there ourselves.

Eli was very far from being a bad man. It was his misfortune to reap the harvests of mischief that had been sown through centuries. He came at the end of a chain of impotent endeavours to realise a great good with imperfect instruments and imperfect methods ; and we blame him for all the faults of the centuries. We constantly hear Eli described as a weak, worthless father, full of corruption, allowing his sons to commit all kinds of sacrilege, blasphemy, impurity, and himself a mere worldling with no heart or soul in him. The Bible, on the contrary, holds Eli up as a great man of God.

He was a priest, and as a priest he had proved himself a true lover of God. As a judge of Israel, certainly, he had done good and noble service to his people, and fought battles for God. What had happened was this. When he got to be an old man, when his bodily strength was going, when his mental

vigour and the energy of his will were sapped, then, under the terrible pressure of adverse circumstances, he held the reins of priestly rule and government with a slack hand. He was over ninety years of age when he died. It was in those last years that he allowed his sons to perpetrate such abuses in their administration. But why do we forget the magnificent life that had gone before? There is many a man who has done a noble work when strong, brave, and clear-minded, to which the generation that sees him die does not do justice. Eli, when told that God's punishment must fall on his house, said to the lad that was to replace him, "It is God's will ; let Him do what is right." That man was a good man, but broken for all effective administration. Again, when he heard of his son's death, his face blanched, yet he still sat erect. When he was told that the Ark of God was taken, he fell down insensible and died. That is not a man without heart, not a man without soul. That is a true man of God.

Eli, it is said, drove his sons to wickedness by the weakness of his personal management : his tuition was so bad and defective that they turned out ill. Is that fair treatment of Eli as a nurturer of youth? Who was it that trained the child Samuel? Who was it that taught Samuel his early religion, and those splendid dreams for Israel and of Israel's God? If you give him the discredit of his bad sons, at least honour him with the credit of bringing up the child Samuel. Besides, there were plenty of people to corrupt Eli's sons. Nor should it be forgotten that Samuel, whom Eli taught, became the strong, powerful Samuel who crushed abuses and corruptions, drove out idolaters, and won battles for Israel.

It is not, however, my purpose to be wholly laudatory of Eli, for there was a dreadful flaw in his character ; this, *viz.*, that as he grew older, he grew far too amiable. It is not a common fault, but all the same it is a worse fault than too great firmness in a man that holds the reins of government. We want our rulers to stand firm and strong. You cannot manage to rule the world by good nature : there must be justice and retribution as well as pity, affection, and love. Through his dislike to do painful things, through that amiable indolence that made him hope that all things might right themselves, he got himself entangled in the evil of other men's lives. The result was that the people were demoralised more and more. All zeal for God and pride in their own national existence, were destroyed in them, so that, when they had to confront the Philistines in battle, they had no manhood left. The Philistines, after an immense massacre, captured the Ark of God, and immediately after that they pressed forward, took Shiloh, and utterly destroyed and left in ruin the Temple of God there. And so the end of Eli's government as high priest of Israel was the utter destruction and annihilation of anything that approached centralisation, and of everything that gave unity and focus to the national and religious life and faith. In short, it was the utter downfall and destruction of that great experiment, the rule by Judges.

The real crisis had been reached ; there was no sanctuary ; the Ark was gone ; Israel had lost its God, lost its own national existence. It was at this stage of moral and religious paralysis, when all existing machinery had broken down, that Samuel came

upon the scene. As to Samuel's childhood, mark how the historians depict the combination in him of all that was hopeful and loving that came out of that great epoch. Though there had been in the mass declension, nevertheless, there was an inner kernel of the people who, impressed by the spectacle of failure and decay, were driven nearer to God, and were discovering that only in living and direct contact with God was there any hope for Israel. Of these Samuel from his youth was the representative. First of all, Samuel in his birth was a Nazarite, and so one that will be recognised as a brother and rightly claimed as a brother by those rigid ascetics who were pledged against idolatrous indulgence within God's land. Then Samuel is taken early to the sanctuary, he is received into the priesthood, though not born to that office ; especially received, out of regard for the vow of his mother. He performs, at all events, certain priestly functions. He, after the great disaster, remains hand and glove with the priesthood : so that he is once again allied to another powerful class and factor in the national and social life. But the supreme thing about Samuel is that he stands out transcendently as a prophet of God. As such he recreated the national life and constitution. Samuel stands out as a prophet of the very first rank : a man possessing a knowledge of God at first hand, knowledge of a supernatural character, and therefore he appears vested with new and creative powers. There is a great deal in the history to justify that conception of Samuel : a great deal to induce us to say that the new period of national progress and success initiated by Samuel has its root in a sudden outburst of original prophetic power and capacity among the Hebrews.

Samuel was a man taken into the secret council of Jehovah, and he found the nation broken to pieces, utterly shattered, trampled beneath the feet of the Philistines ; the nation's God degraded, the sanctuary gone, all national organisation, rule, and authority utterly demolished. His commission was to restore, but he could only begin slowly. His great power lay in his character as God's prophet. Probably for twenty years he wielded that power only. Not as a military dictator, not as a great deliverer, not as a priest, nor even as a Nazarite did he work, but as a man who knew the will of God, as a man in whom God's spirit dwelt. He went about among the people, everywhere fanning the flame of old memories of Israel's greatness, everywhere making men, in spite of all the external shipwreck and ruin, feel a strange inner certainty that God had not forsaken them, but that He had great things in store for them, and that the way to reach God's heart was to come back to God Himself.

Everywhere Samuel, Nazarite and prophet, led a crusade against heathen worship, against sensual practices, against idolatry : everywhere he fanned a great fire of absolute religious enthusiasm in the people. Then, at last, a day came when his hold of the nation was strong enough to justify the experiment, and he raised the standard of revolt against the Philistines. The Philistines, in the midst of a providential storm, are thrown into confusion, and he wins an easy victory. It was God's deed : it for ever confirmed Samuel's claim to be God's prophet ; it renewed, by a visible token, Israel's confidence in God's presence among them. A new era in national growth begins.

I think the likeliest reading of the later history is this. When the first enthusiasm had died out the measure of prosperity regained produced the old engrossment in material pursuits, and the mind of the people began once more to sink into apathy and weakness. Bit by bit the Philistines recovered their hold upon the people. Precisely because Samuel had stirred the life in the core of the national existence, precisely because he had shown them the possibility of a great career, precisely because inside that mass of apathetic, worldly-minded men he had established great and powerful classes of men devoted to religion, to patriotism, to God—the Nazarites and the schools of the prophets ; men of ecstatic fervour, an inspired brotherhood, with a wild zeal like that which animated the monks of the early Christian ages : precisely because he had formed within the nation that inner core of vitality, of religion, of patriotism, the nation did not succumb as soon as this new danger made itself thoroughly felt. On the contrary, the leaders, the elders, the chiefs of all the towns and the districts consulted together. The firm conviction had grown up within them that, if they were to hold their own, then they must have a more closely-knit national organisation, a more intense centralisation of public spirit and of public government : in short, they must cease to be tribes, cease to be small communes united together only in the presence of a common enemy for a common advantage ; they must become a military nation, and for that they must have an elective hereditary monarchy. And so they come to Samuel. “The whole system has been found wanting,” they said ; “a king ruling in the name of Jehovah we must have, if we are to hold our own against the neighbour-

ing nations." But Samuel disapproved. First of all, that demand was a moral and religious declension. It was a confession, on the Israelites' part, that they could not realise the full grandeur of their destiny. It meant a deliberate acceptance of the second best, instead of the very best. The detail of what happened is worked out fully in the narrative of the eighth chapter.

Moreover there were a great many drawbacks, which I will merely catalogue, to be set against the advantages. The advantages were that undoubtedly Israel would gain in mass and force to withstand attack, that it would be able to develop the internal resources of its own country by this step. United under a king, Israel would moreover be able to seize territory that hitherto had not been conquered by other communities and tribes; it would have an intenser sense of its own national spirit; it would form a wider idea of its own place in the world. Undoubtedly Israel would gain in many ways. But, on the other hand, Israel would lose. Instead of the old independence, the rank and file of the citizens would be reduced to comparative insignificance. That is the great evil always of a strong centralised government, as distinguished from decentralisation; and undoubtedly the aim of all social existence should always be to preserve the advantages of a powerful central government, but at the cost of as little sacrifice as possible of local home rule. That is a problem which our own country still has to work out. With a king, court and metropolis, the equilibrium of the land would be disturbed. A king must make his state magnificent, and taxes must be imposed on farmers and merchants everywhere to

support that royal dignity. A standing army, too, must be maintained, and the cost of that, too, would fall on the land. The natural effect of having a king would be to develop large towns ; not merely the metropolis, but towns everywhere ; also to establish a class of professional governors, of high-born military leaders, of local governors, of tax-collectors. Invariably it has been seen that a people broken up into tribes maintains a considerable uniformity in the distribution of wealth ; and that, wherever empires or kingdoms are formed, and a central government is established, you have at once a large development of all activities, material, industrial, and physical ; but at the same time you have a rapid increase of wealth in a few hands and of impoverishment in the hands of the mass of the people.

Now do justice to the grandeur of Samuel. Mark what the request for a king meant ! It was a public declaration that Samuel had failed, and no great man likes to hear that verdict pronounced upon him by his countrymen, the men he has worked with and fought for, before he lies down and dies. It was heart-breaking to Samuel, and yet I think that, with his statesmanlike eyes and intellect, he saw the necessity of it. He had tried so bravely, so magnanimously ; and the people now came to him in his old age and told him that he had failed utterly. They asked him, as it were, to dethrone himself, to set himself aside, and to give them something new, and something different.

I think that one of the most magnanimous, and majestic, and heroical deeds ever done in our world's story was done by Samuel, when, convinced that it was the will of God, he set himself to do what no

other man could do : to forsake all his past, to abandon all the lines of action on which he had worked through the best years of his life, and to put into other men's hands fresh possibilities. That meant the condemnation of all his efforts. Think what it was for this great statesman to have seen what was the ideal of his country's greatness, moral and material, to have struggled for a life-time to give effect to that ideal, to have done a good deal to have established it, and then to have the grandeur, the honesty, the detachment from self and pride, to come forward publicly and confess that his whole policy had been a failure ; not because it was wrong, but because, through ancient evils making the realisation of his high ideal impossible, the only thing that could be done was to accept something inferior. Quite willingly, cordially, and heartily, without himself becoming the leader of the new movement and unsaying all his past, he was ready to do what in him lay, loyally, with God's might and strength, to make the new departure a great success.

I call that conduct magnificent. But Samuel had been providentially prepared by God to make that dangerous transition. Think what it meant ; if Samuel had stubbornly said, " I cannot do it," it could not have been done. But though grieved in his soul, and recognising that there was a moral declension in this new departure, foreseeing too that it would be but a partial success, he yet saw it was the one thing to do, and generously, nobly, used that marvellous, unprecedented position of his, as Nazarite, priest, prophet, judge of Israel, to abdicate his own position, to give up the struggle of his whole life, and to give birth to a wonderful new epoch in which he

would have little or no part, but to which he looked for the realisation of what he could not himself do ; and this for God's glory and for Israel's welfare.

I ask those who know Hebrew history to recall the wonderful part the kingship played in Israel's history : Saul, David, Solomon : Solomon with his immense wealth, prestige, wisdom, and with a happy nation around him. Look at the period of the Judges, with its poverty, its sordidness, its helplessness, its impotence. Samuel was the creator of Israel's monarchical glory. Several kings, one after another, proved failures ; but all the same through those centuries of monarchical government, the prophets gained time to rise from the material into the spiritual, the true idea of God's kingdom on earth. And that was not all. This second best, the demand for which had grieved Samuel, became the symbol and promise of that Divine kingship which was to meet the desire of all the nations. Israel learned that God's kingdom was one which never could be won by sword nor built up by legislation ; that it was a spiritual kingdom, which must be in every man's heart and soul. They learned too that the true king must be the Son of God, with the whole heart of God in Him ; not a warrior, not a priest, not a prophet, not a hero-judge, but righteous, pure, sinless, doing the will of God perfectly, because God is in Him, as God was in Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV.

HOSEA.

IN my desire to cover the field of our present inquiry, I must deal with the whole question in a rough, popular way. I propose to strike various notes of thought and feeling that seem to me most interesting in our subject of study. I shall, first of all, make sure that you and I are thinking in the same way about the Hebrew prophets, when we talk about them.

A Hebrew prophet was not a sort of extraordinary magical oracle that was always telling people in a mystically wise kind of way little things that were going to happen, or predicting big things that were going to occur. The supreme end of a Hebrew prophet's action in predicting events was not so much to prove himself correct in having foreseen, but rather to influence the people, to divert them from evil ways, to bring them back to the paths of goodness. And so there are a great many prophecies of coming evil in the Old Testament that have never been fulfilled, *e.g.*, the prophecy of Jonah as to the destruction of Nineveh, because the people repented. There is a school of interpreters who think that a great deal of prophecy about the Holy Land and with reference to the Jews after the flesh still awaits fulfilment. These

good people imagine that the inspiration of the Bible requires that every earthly prediction should have literal, earthly fulfilment. Their concern is, I think, quite unnecessary. A great many things that particular prophets expected to come to pass never did come to pass. Jonah cried, "In forty days Nineveh is to be destroyed," and was very much disgusted because it did not happen. Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "You have got to make your will, to set your house in order"; and yet God revokes that. There you have two concrete examples. The Divine purpose of the prophet's mission in the life and history of Israel was not to astonish people by anticipating the future: the reason of his existence was rather, as God's servant, to exert a practical, moral, religious influence on the people of his own time and his own generation.

I will add one other thing on this point. Undoubtedly those Hebrew prophets had a supernatural, Divine enlightenment given to them. With all my heart and soul I believe in the core and kernel of those great doctrines of supernatural revelation and supernatural inspiration; but, remember, God's supernatural is always natural, through and through. God did not use the prophets like speaking trumpets. He conveyed His inspirations—His Divine intuition and anticipation of what was going to happen, His own hidden mind and will, the secret energies working beneath history—He *conveyed* these, not merely through their vocal organs to their fellows, but through their minds, through their own thinking, reasoning, struggling, in faith, hope, and endeavour, to see and to know God; *i.e.*, through mind and heart and spirit, as well as through voice.

Therefore, in the whole calling of the prophets, and in the entire method through which they reached their knowledge and delivered it to the people, you must not think of them as being quite apart from us. Why, we have experience of the same kind in the work of conscience. We teach our children that conscience is the voice of God: and would to heaven we felt what we teach! It *is* teaching, if we do it. God speaks to you and to me as directly and as supernaturally as He did to those Old Testament prophets.

First, you have the real personal action of God in inspiring the prophets, and revealing His mind and will to them; and, secondly, you have them declaring and realising that they received that Divine enlightenment, that supernatural enlightenment, in the most ordinary, simple, human, and natural ways and processes. In those facts you have a gain to evangelical truth; and there you and I may find lessons, examples, and inspirations for ourselves.

To get to know an Old Testament prophet, we want to find out what he was in his own day; what he said to his own people, what they understood him to say, what effect that had upon them; what aims and purposes he set before himself, as he spoke in public and forced his way into the councils of kings, and addressed great mob-meetings of his fellow-subjects in the streets of Samaria or Jerusalem. What was the man actually, practically, driving at? What was he seeking to accomplish in his own age and among his own people?

Our subject is the prophet Hosea. I must show you the background against which stands out his figure, full of pathos and beauty, religious value and worth. Therefore I must sketch to you the region of

the kingdom of Samaria: the Northern kingdom, usually called the kingdom of Israel, in distinction from the kingdom of Judah. Palestine is a lofty table-land of broken hill-ridges, lying along the eastern end of the Mediterranean; away to the north are deserts, with fertile districts lying between, once occupied by various races, such as the Syrians and the Hittites. Away beyond, in the fertile valley of the Euphrates, lay the Assyrian Empire; and away to the west and south the mighty Egyptian Empire, in the rich plain made by another great river, the Nile. In the time of Hosea these were the two world-powers, the mighty empires, that controlled the Eastern and Western hemispheres.

Palestine lay like a bridge on the highway between those two great empires. Let me point out the political position occupied by it. It was, practically, precisely in the same unhappy position that Afghanistan holds in regard to India and the Russian advance through Central Asia. Those two empires, Assyria and Egypt, hate each other, and are competing with each other for the control of the world—for the mastery of the great highways of commerce, for the wealth of human industry. They must approach each other along that highway, in the midst of which lies Palestine.

You see, therefore, that that little country, lying between these two empires, was exposed to the threatening danger of advance from opposite sides. Moreover, it became the very focus of plots on the part of those two contending powers; and just as in Afghanistan, so, constantly, it happened in Northern Israel, that you had two pretenders to the throne, one actually in power and the other his rival. The one in

power holds his throne backed up by Assyria, while his rival is put up and supported by the great empire of Egypt. The consequence was ceaseless faction-fights and constant revolutions in the government in that Northern kingdom, very much the spectacle we lately witnessed in Afghanistan.

Going back to the period of the Judges, you remember how the confederated tribes—the Jewish tribes—took possession of Canaan, driving out, partially, the old inhabitants. One particular weakness that arose out of their tolerating the continued existence of the Canaanitish towns and colonies in their own land was this: The wedge of the Canaanitish towns ran right across the middle of the country possessed by the twelve tribes; between the ten Northern tribes and the two Southern ones, Benjamin and Judah. Moreover, there was a natural break in the country, caused by specially wide valleys and passes. During the period of the Judges, power, authority, and dignity mostly lay to the north; Ephraim was the commanding tribe. One of the kings that came after the troubled reign of Saul, king of all the twelve tribes, was a man of the people—King David—whose dynasty was permanently established on the original Hebrew throne. During David's strong rule, the whole of the kingdom was held together, but not without difficulty. There were symptoms of revolt. During Solomon's reign, the unity of the kingdom was also maintained. But when his son Rehoboam was made king, insubordination broke out. There were two main causes, one civil and the other religious. First of all, Solomon had made great modifications in the local, communal method of government. He attempted to abolish the whole of the tribal districts, to form his kingdom

into provinces, and to establish a government ruled by governors appointed by himself. It was a proper stroke of imperial policy. But it excited enmities ; it had a tendency to centralisation, and also to further reduce the power, influence, and dignity of the Northern tribes. Solomon likewise erected at Jerusalem a magnificent temple. Those were the two causes—religious and civil jealousies.

You remember the deputation that waited on King Rehoboam, and the foolish answer he gave. Instead of going a long way to meet discontent and dissatisfaction, he took the high-handed course of coercion, and said : “ My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke ; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.” The result was that the ten Northern tribes revolted ; and Jeroboam was established as king.

All I can do is just to sketch to you the main character of the career of the Northern kingdom. It was exposed to rivalries, attacks from a number of small nations—Philistia, Phœnicia, Ammon, Moab, and especially Syria. It held its own with varying fortunes, sometimes successful, sometimes beaten, suffering a good deal in the constant wear and tear of those endless border wars. Its history was one of ceaseless vicissitude and disunion. The Southern kingdom always held together, more or less. It retained the family of David on the throne from its commencement to the end, over a period of four hundred years. But the wretched Northern kingdom changed its royal family seven times in the course of a period a little over two hundred years.

Then came a succession of assassinations and revolts. Indeed, we know that the internal condition

of the kingdom in those last years of its existence, in which it was crushed by Assyria, was something like a baker's oven when the fire has broken into it and is burning with fierce heat and flame all that the oven contains. The kingdom was rent by military adventurers sticking at nothing, the country was a scene of bloodshed and anarchy ; all ties of relationship and mutual loyalty and trust were broken up, and the fire was stirred from both sides, by Assyria to the north, and Egypt to the south-west.

That is a rough sketch of the history of the Northern kingdom. The period in which Hosea worked began near the termination of the long reign of the most statesmanlike and warlike of Israel's kings, Jeroboam the Second. He was a man of great ability, of indomitable will. He knew how to organise his resources ; he conducted successful wars against the neighbouring rival nations. Moreover, he was favoured by the advance of Assyria from the north. Assyria began to attack the kingdom of Damascus, which had always been the most dangerous rival and opponent of Israel. Israel took advantage of that to recover its old ascendancy, to regain portions of territory of which it had been robbed. During the reign of Jeroboam, the Northern kingdom acquired great wealth and great fame, and a warlike spirit was developed. Religion, commerce, practically everything, flourished, except the actual well-being of the people ; for a power built up by war is not naturally wholesome, is not founded on a stable basis. It may bring the appearance of great prosperity, wealth, and commerce, but it is purchased by the destruction of the foundation of national welfare ; for all the wealth goes into the hands of the

king and of the ruling classes. Instead of a great quantity of small freeholders, we find that the misery and the poverty of the slaves and serfs, the daily labourers in the towns, and the peasantry in the country, was something horrible and pitiable.

It is a law of revelation that the great prophets always appeared at critical points in the national history. For instance, Elijah and Elisha appeared like two storm-birds presaging the troubled, bloody end of the great dynasty of Omri. In like fashion Hosea and Amos heralded the downfall of the great, imposing dynasty of Jehu. The actual ruin of Jehu's house did not take place for some time after. Ostensibly, to the end of King Jeroboam the Second's reign, Israel was prosperous. It took the Divine insight of the prophets of God, Hosea and Amos, to expose the ostentatious religion, with its elaborate ritual, luxury, impurity, and idolatry—to understand that what looked like a shining summer would end with nothing but the snows and frosts of utter desolation.

We gather that Hosea was a native of the Northern kingdom, and not a native of Judæa, as was his colleague Amos. It is just possible that he belonged to the aristocracy. Probably he was of priestly rank; at all events, he had a wonderful knowledge of Israel's past history. We see that Hosea was himself a citizen of the Northern kingdom when we compare his book with the book of Amos. Amos also writes, with an exact, vivid power of delineation, about wrongs and oppressions, about the political and religious position in the kingdom of Samaria. But here is the distinction. The words of Amos sound like a voice from outside, pealing with the thunder of God's anger and righteous indignation against wrongs and injuries that

Amos does not feel himself bound up with. The characteristic of Hosea's book is that the burden of Israel's guilt lies weighty on his soul ; he wails, and mourns, and laments, and repents with that sinful people. He cannot, without tears in his eyes, contemplate the glorious opportunities that have been flung away. He almost expresses a sense of his vicarious involvement in their guilt and carrying of their sorrows. That is the note which gives its exquisite music of pathos and beauty to Hosea's prophecy of the coming downfall of his own land and of his own people.

The characteristic idea—indeed, the key-thought that underlies the whole of Hosea's prophetic message, is a very remarkable one. He pictures the relation between God and Israel as a marriage tie. It is of little use to try to divide the Book of Hosea into minute paragraphs and divisions, and to trace a line of thought through it, because, if there is any book in the Bible which is one long musical burst of emotional life and harmonious unity from beginning to end, it is the Book of Hosea. The man was not so much an intellect ; he was a great, overflowing heart. He cannot think out things and reason out things. He sways like a pendulum from one extreme to another : now blazing indignation against the people's wickedness and blindness and madness, and the next moment lamenting over them like a mother over her only son.

Emotion is the characteristic of Hosea's writing. Thought, again, is the characteristic of the writing of Amos. And so far as thought goes, the key-doctrine of Amos is this: God is righteous sovereignty. The key-doctrine of Hosea is this : God is holy love.

The key-conception of Hosea's doctrine, Hosea's gospel, Hosea's prophecy is that the actual, real relation between God and Israel is best represented for his purpose by the tie between husband and wife. It is true that he varies that image near the end of his prophecy: there he pictures God as his father and Israel as his child, his son; but still the great, moulding, explaining thought, throughout the whole book, is the marriage tie as a picture of the covenant between Jehovah and His people.

How did Hosea come to choose that as the image or metaphor of the relation of Jehovah to His people? Very probably because it was an idea that lay in all the heathen religions round about: an idea that had corrupted the religion of Israel, for the gods Baal and Ashteroth predominantly represented the powers of nature, and especially the power of reproduction. That conception of a people being the offspring of their god and his spouse furnished to Hosea a basis on which to picture the tie between Jehovah and Israel. But, you say, when that idea had been so corrupted and defiled, how came it that Hosea did not discard it and choose a purer image? The answer to that will come best when we see what use Hosea makes of the discarded and dishonoured image or conception.

Let us run over the essential points and thoughts in Hosea's message. The first thing we have to pick out and fix in our minds in the message he delivered to his own age is the terrible picture he makes of Israel's utter moral ruin; and, more than that, of Israel's physical, social, moral, political, and religious dissolution. Powerfully and passionately he scathes the oppression, the cruelty, and the selfish ambition

that had impoverished and destroyed the conditions of happy and wholesome life for the mass of the people. Then he pillories the corruption of all justice, the taint of bribery that had ruined all the moral influence of every representative of law and government, priest-judge, and civil-judge. But what chiefly occupies Hosea is a loathing horror of the moral blight and stain that have appeared through the whole of the relationships of the people. The very sanctuary of Jehovah had attached to it a band of loathsome prostitutes, who served the temple in what were accounted acts of worship to Baal, the god of reproduction, and earned money to feed the greedy priests, and to aggrandise the external show and pomp of the sanctuary. When religion consecrated lust, that meant that all purity of family ties, all stainless virtue in the womanhood of the country, got its death.

The next thing Hosea strikes at is this—the utter loosening and dissolution of all law and order, and righteousness between man and man. The noble oppresses the peasant, the money-lender grinds with his cruel usury the poor victim he has got under his clutches, the corn-dealers band together to raise the price of bread in the starving towns, so that the poor are driven to desperation. Noble fights against noble, faction-fights fill the whole land, conspiracies destroy the foundations of the throne, the king is assassinated by his most trusted friends and followers and servants; everywhere there is violence and rebellion, and all the ties and bonds that bind a nation together have been torn asunder.

Third, political ruin had fallen upon Israel. Placed there in that position of unsettlement, of exposure to

the intrigues of two powerful empires, the people were driven on to ruin by the selfish schemes and disunion of their leaders and rulers, who did not comprehend that a nation's real welfare consists in virtue, in brotherhood, in justice, in mercy, in industry, in well-doing, in loving union of class with class, in the obedience of all to God above, in faith and heroic aspiration to work out a career on earth worthy of God who called them to be a nation. But Israel's leaders, Israel's rulers, were playing a mad, foolish game.

Those are the three great elements of Israel's corruption and of the ruin that had already established itself in the realm.

Now we come to the causes of Israel's downfall and degradation. The first cause Hosea points out for us in the shape of tremendous denunciation of Israel's prophets and Israel's priests. Strange that ! It makes a man, by profession a preacher—a religious preacher—first tremble and then experience a great exaltation and inspiration. Hosea thinks that the most powerful force in a people resides, not in its wealth, not in its military might, not in its law or legislation, not even in its throne and government, but that the sovereign, dominating influence that makes or mars a nation resides in its moral and religious teachers. Whether they wield that influence by voice or by the pen, a nation's thinkers, morally and religiously, in the pulpit, in the press, on the platform, are a nation's heart. If that be diseased, woe betide the people ! If the heart be kept sound, pumping and pulsating pure blood away through diseased parts and members of the body politic, there is hope, there is recovery, there is life, there is a future.

The second cause of Israel's utter corruption and ruin lay in the debasement and falsification of true religion. The God Hosea knew was a great, spiritual God : a God whose whole being cared supremely for moral things, not for physical things ; a God who meant this world to be only as a means to an end, to be the platform on which a human drama was to be played, a scaffolding within which a temple of eternal human character of goodness was to be built up, a kingdom of heaven on earth. Hosea's God longed for righteousness, justice, truth, mercy between man and man ; for aspirations of unselfishness, of heavenliness in human hearts. Israel's God bore the same name as Hosea's God. Israel's God, worshipped at His shrine, was Jehovah—Jehovah, the old orthodox God of the nation. And Israel had not cancelled one of the old articles of its creed. Israel had not touched one of the laws that came down out of antiquity—laws stamped with the name and backed by the will of Jehovah. But Israel had utterly transformed the character of the God it worshipped. The God of Israel had sunk down to be a God of physical force, of sensual pleasures ; a God of wine, revelry, lust ; a God contaminated by everything materialistic, superstitious.

Hosea says the question is not what is the name of a nation's God, not what is the state-established religion, but what is the real religion, what is the real God, what is the real faith, the real aspiration, of a people ?

What is the god of Great Britain now ? Wealth. Wealth to be won by a merciless application of the laws of competition, and selfishness, and rivalry, and a so-called political economy, at the sacrifice of thousands of human lives driven by the hard wheels

of commerce and competition down into the mire and crushed out of human shape and form. The question is not, What is the God whose creed we recite in our churches? but, What is the God that dominates in our politics? What is the God that rules in our cities, and in our commerce? What is the God that is worshipped in our actual homes, in all our efforts to change customs, to reach noble ends? Is it the God of justice, truth, mercy, human love, the God that is building a kingdom on earth? Or is it mammon? or is it human pride? or is it selfish advantage? Is it a God that will tolerate anarchy, and lawlessness, and hatred, and strife between class and class?

Hosea says the future of a nation hangs, not on the name of its God, nor on the creed of its worshippers, but on the actual God that is honoured, that is obeyed, that is worshipped.

Then, thirdly, Hosea declares that Israel's ruin is the ripe outcome of a total falseness in its very existence, its *raison d'être*, the fundamental principle of its being, its position as a state—defiant of God's will, thwarting the Divine designs.

Here is a strange thing. The Northern rebellion was divinely authorised. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha spake not one word against the separate existence of the Northern kingdom; and now Hosea comes and says the existence of this Northern kingdom is a sin, out of which all other sin grows, and must end in ruin. There you have a splendid insight into the true nature of prophecy. Prophecy never made a declaration of absolute, infallible dicta of the perfect, complete will of God. Prophecy was opportunist. It spoke just the present truth, and it

did not say, "An age hence this will not be true"; "that has been God's will all along." Prophecy always pointed to present duty.

Present duty is often the outcome of contending principles. An existent wrong may demand as its rightful remedy a thing wrong in itself. That was exactly the Divine justification of the first rebellion. It was an assertion of liberty against oppression. It was probably, to some extent, the assertion of the spiritual religion against the state-degraded religion that Rehoboam wanted to establish at Jerusalem. In any case, it had its justification in that it was a protest against tyranny and despotism. The course that is justified by pre-existent evil nevertheless dare not become permanent, or else it will create worse evils. If, in the government of a country, you are forced to adopt such a course as coercion, your whole longing must be to get rid of it as soon as you can. Napoleon, you remember, said: "You can do anything with bayonets, except sit down on them." Governments must not sit down permanently on force.

Mark the difficulty of altering a course once entered upon. Note the awful power of an act or a decision to assert a separate existence for ourselves, when once taken, to escape from all control and to establish a force and an influence with our character that we never dreamt of. Take the case of a relation entered into with some one of a certain definite character. You fancied you would control and mould it. Ah! there it lives its own life; and moulds you.

Once that Northern kingdom was established with its throne, with its civil service, with its army, with its own shrines and places of worship—all of which

had to be aggrandised, and emphasised, and backed up, to hold their own against the attraction of the centre at Jerusalem—with a priesthood, with hatreds and rivalries between the North and the South, how hard it was, in the teeth of all that, to always say, “We have rebelled ; we have established a kingdom, but not permanently ; the moment that we can reunite with Judæa we must do it” ! On the contrary, you had all these vested interests struggling to make the revolt permanent and unchangeable.

Hosea found in the original sin of the wilful, needless perpetuation of the rupture the root of all subsequent evils. First of all, do you see how, once that rupture had taken place, once that Northern throne had been established by revolt and violence, there is a terrible tendency in anarchy, in lawlessness, in violence, to breed and repeat themselves ? As at Jezreel, bloodshed will avenge itself with bloodshed. I do not say that revolution is not sometimes necessary ; but then, if a nation is wise, it will set its face determinately against a repetition of revolutions. Perhaps England has been wiser in that respect than other countries. It has had its revolutions, but it has not had a lot of them, like France. Once the rupture was made in religion, the terrible temptation that pressed upon the priests in the North to make their sanctuaries more attractive by rich and lavish luxuries had a tendency towards self-indulgence for its own pleasure and lust. Moreover, the Northern kingdom was more exposed to the contamination of such worship, because it felt bound to bid for favour and to please the people.

Last of all, there lay, like a demoralising blight and chill at the heart of the Northern empire, the lack of

some great, grand reason for its existence. It was a wrong of the South that had created it. That is a poor basis for a man to stand upon and protest. The South held to its grand belief that it had the true God, and God's chosen king. It held God's mandate to do God's will. But the Northern kingdom that protested against the wrong of the South, not able to believe it had the Divine charter, had slipped down into self-seeking selfishness and earthly aggrandisement. Here was no great, noble enthusiasm, no sense of a magnificent, single purpose and destiny in the world's history, to lift up its life, government, and religion. The kingdom inevitably sank down into a poor, an unprincipled, a selfish, a violent, a lawless condition.

Was there any hope of recovery? There was; and yet that hope lay like sunlight in the very heart of a night of darkest desolation and seeming despair. Hosea looked to renovation—moral, religious, national renovation. He looked to natural causes. He looked to poverty increasing till it became intolerable. He looked to bloodshed and anarchy growing until they were insupportable. He looked to the utter dissolution of the nation's state. He looked to foreign conquest. He looked to exile in alien lands. He looked to natural processes of suffering and misery to produce a moral and a religious reform.

Do you know that is God's universal way? If you will read the world's history, you will find that famines, the growth of intolerable poverty in towns, the insupportableness of life among the peasantry, have been God's educative influences for waking the nations up to their proper career, moral, philanthropic, religious.

Hosea and Amos teach men to see in Assyria the mere tool in the hand of a just and an avenging God. Why, even the very ruin of the nation drives men not to despair, but to reverence of God. The mere awful fear of recognition of God as the God of retribution is not enough. There needs to come this second experience ; when a long-continued, wilful, obdurate sinner has had the resistance of his pride broken down, there come to him regrets, strange pathetic visions of what he might have been, sudden perceptions of a Divine hand that reached out to him all along that pathway of folly, which, if he had only taken hold of it, must have lifted him up to honourable and noble achievements. He suddenly says : " This hand that strikes me with retributive ruin is the hand of One who loves me." All the past is filled with God, and then the present. Thus God in punishing is loving still—punishing therefore, not as vengeance, punishing as chastisement, punishing as educative discipline, punishing for restoration. Oh, the grandeur of that conception ! A God that punishes His own loved child for sin must be such a holy God ; who, when He strikes, hurts His own heart more than He hurts His own child ; who does it to bring that child back to Himself and goodness. Oh the love of the punishing, recovering God ! Hosea's God is a God of holy love.

Now come back to Hosea's key-thought and image. God's relation to Israel is that of a husband to wife ; not of master to purchased slave and harlot, but of husband to wife, bent on being wedded to His spouse in righteousness, in purity, in lovingkindness, in mercy, in virtue, in holiness. That conception of marriage so tender, so grieved, so forgiving, so cling-

ing, how came Hosea to have that wondrous thought about God? It was something new. You find nothing like it in the Bible, before Hosea. That was the new revelation, the supernatural revelation to Hosea. How did God give it to him? Speak it to him mechanically? Ah, no! Divine revelations must be writ, not in type like printer's; they must be writ into the very sinew and web of the human heart and spirit, into a man's life. It is by experience God teaches man, by making man in His own image. Then a man sees and knows the image of God.

Go back to that story of Hosea's. As it is often told in a superficial, blundering way, it is something so paralysing that the majority of commentators have said it is mere allegory, and that Hosea only did it in symbolical action. The thing would be revolting in fact; it would be equally revolting in symbol or allegory. Moreover, how could it ever have an edifying effect upon a people ruined by sensuality and lust? It is a story of how God taught Hosea to understand God's heart, and so it was no allegory, no symbolical representation. It was a real experience. But comprehend what it was. For one thing, the very power of it depends on this, that Hosea's relation to the one unfaithful to him had at its very core and heart an exquisitely noble, genuine, true, human love. Hosea, a man of lofty character, grieved, broken-hearted for the sin of his own time, prayed to God, struggling to know God's will, and in the providence of God is led to fall into a pure, sworn, noble love. He dreams of a bright, happy home with a woman to whom his heart goes out, whom he counts true, pure, and good, and lovely in return. He loves her, has children by her, learns to know what sweet human love is. Then

a terrible disaster comes upon him: she proves unfaithful, and Hosea comprehends that this guilt that has struck his heart in his own house is but a bit of the great pervading pollution of his time. It is that degraded religion, that unfaithfulness to God, that declension of all purity in the land that has broken into his own family circle and has cut his heart till it bleeds. Oh, how the prophet's soul flamed with an unfelt-before indignation against the evils of his time, when, in God's providence, he felt them in the tenderest fibres of his being!

That was the beginning of God's revelation to Hosea, but not the end of it. Hosea was told how Israel had been unfaithful to God, and that made him comprehend God's loathing of Israel's sin. The fierce anger blazed out against her who had injured him; then in the desolation of his home after she had fled from him, the relents, the agony, the old memories, the dreams that would come up, for the past could be recalled—in all that passing through Hosea's heart, he felt the echoes of the great heart of God; and then a thing almost beyond human nature happened to him. His heart grew so tender and so pitiful, that when he heard that his unfaithful spouse had been cast off by her paramour, had sunk into wretched poverty, had become a slave despised and ground down, the old love waked up within him; and he conceived a heroic deed of loyalty, forgiveness, and reclamation, almost supernatural, to go and love again, to buy her back out of her degradation and misery, which had made her repentant; not at once to restore the old ties—that might not be—but with infinite, wise lovingness to give her a chance to prove that she had returned to purity, to penitence, to affection.

V.

JOEL.

OUR subject is the Book of the Prophet Joel. You will very soon discover that it is remarkably different from the Book of Hosea. The study of Hosea's writing compelled us to realise all the political, social, religious life of a very great and splendid epoch in the history of Israel. The Book of Joel takes us very largely out of the secular life of men into a region of literary history, and opens up for us theological subjects of study. The book stands in a different order among the minor prophets in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament from the position it occupies in the earliest translation, the translation into Greek called the Septuagint. In the former the order of the first six minor prophets is as we have it in our English Bible ; in the latter, it is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah. These last three books have no statement as to date attached to them ; and from the diversity in their position in the Hebrew and in the Greek it is evident that the learned men who put together the Old Testament in Hebrew and the learned men who arranged the Greek translation of it had different views as to the period when these three prophets lived and worked. That means there was

no certain tradition about them. The editors had to read and study them, and to form their own conclusion where they should come in. The only thing you can say from the position of Joel in the Hebrew, and also in the Septuagint, is that the old editors apparently believed Joel to be one of the earliest prophets. On the other hand, scholars now-a-days are inclined to think that Joel was one of the very latest of them. It is quite possible that the position of the book in the collection of minor prophets does not tell us what the old editors thought as to the date of it. In several cases it looks as if they arranged the books, not so much in their chronological order, as in groups; *i.e.*, they grouped the books together on account of certain affinities and relationships between those they placed in proximity.

We have, however, to take the book, read it, and form our own conclusion as to the point in Israel's history when Joel lived and prophesied and spoke for God. We know practically nothing about him. His name means "Jehovah is God." We are told the name of Joel's father, but not where Joel was born; nor is it stated when he lived. From his book we can gather with certainty that he prophesied at Jerusalem, and belonged to the Southern kingdom of Judah. From the prominence he gives to sacrifice, to the temple, and to the priest, some critics think he must have been a priest himself. I do not know that there is much in that. The fact is, that beyond his name and that he prophesied at Jerusalem, we know nothing about the man.

I should require to go pretty carefully through the writing, and to give an analysis of it, in order to make you comprehend the larger part of the beauties and

significances that are so thickly strewn among its pages ; because, if there is a book in the Bible that is a masterpiece of literary art, it is the Book of Joel. There are other prophets who write with greater passion and greater power, who rise to loftier altitudes of Divine revelation ; but there is hardly a writer in the Old Testament who shows proof of so careful, and detailed, and exquisite pains to give his work literary polish, finish, and beauty.

As to the style of Joel, in the first half of the book its characteristic is that of a consummate literary artist or word-painter. He makes pictures to stand out before you by graphic, vivid words, full of colour, full of imagery : pictures that *show* you the things that the man is describing. Then in the second half he suddenly changes his style in great part, and becomes the impassioned orator, rising into a world of wild, lurid imagery, as he pictures to us his conception of the last judgment.

So much for the style. I now go to the contents of the book. It falls into two great divisions. The first of these runs from the beginning on to the end of the seventeenth verse of the second chapter. The second division begins with the eighteenth verse of the second chapter, and travels on to the end of the book. The first half contains a terrible description of disasters, and a foreboding of worse calamities to come. The second half of the book passes on into glorious promises of God's goodness to Israel, and then rises up to a picture of the great judgment of the world.

I will run over the book and give you its subdivisions. For the first chapter you may take as a heading ; Present Disasters ; Calamities that have Actually Arrived. The second chapter consists of

Future Forebodings. The first chapter again divides itself into subsections.

The calamities that have befallen Judæa are the visitation of swarm after swarm of locusts, that are eating up everything in the country. Here is the start. The first paragraph is from vers. 1 to 4. The first verse gives the superscription or the title of the book. Then we read : "Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers?" Do you not feel the literary effect of this? He travels back through the bygone ages to find a parallel to this awful disaster that has fallen on the land, and he can find none in the past. Then he pictures the memory of it travelling down to generation after generation, a horror so terrible as never to be forgotten by mankind. The literary art with which he instantly makes a tremendous impression of the magnitude of the disaster that is before their eyes is extremely powerful. Here it is : "That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten." Observe the reiteration : swarm after swarm eating the very heart out of the country until nothing is left.

Then come three pictures, three *tableaux* that rise up to a climax, delineating the ruin that has been wrought. The first idea is that the reign of luxury, of revelry, has come to an end in the land. "Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the jaw-teeth of a great lion" (vers. 5, 6). Of course, it is poetical language descrip-

tive of the tiny teeth of myriads and myriads of locust hordes. "He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree : he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away." That is, the locust has peeled the bark, and left fragments of it, which it has not swallowed, in a ring around the foot of the tree. "The branches thereof stand out white" (ver. 7) : a powerful picture of the fruit tree stripped of all its leaves, stripped of its very bark, and standing with its ghastly white arms in the sunlight.

The next paragraph is from vers. 8 to 10, and may be headed : The Consolations of Religion Cut off. "Lament like a virgin"—or bride—"girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth." It is an exquisite idea ; religious worship is depicted as a happy intercourse between God and the one He loves on earth, His chosen people. That is broken off, because the material for sacrifice cannot be found ; and so, as it were, no holy breath of human affection goes up to God in heaven, nor answering love from God comes down. "The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the Lord ; the priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn. The field is wasted, the land mourneth ; for the corn is wasted, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth," *i.e.*, withereth away.

The next paragraph (vers. 11, 12) may be headed : The Necessaries of Existence Cut off. That is the climax. Luxury—those who counted on that robbed of it ; religion—those who comforted themselves with it robbed of it ; then the food of the common people, the prosaic bread and fruit, the very necessities of life, gone ! "Be ashamed"—or, be in confusion—"O ye husbandmen, howl, O ye vine-dressers, for the wheat and for the barley. . . . The vine is withered ; . . .

the pomegranate, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered : for joy is withered away from the sons of men." All the land stripped white ; leafless, stark, and naked ; the whole face of the earth, the vineyards, the gardens, the farms withered. And then that blighted, withered whiteness spreads into the faces of the men who own those gardens and vineyards and farms : the desolation of the country is thus reflected back in the gaunt faces of starving men, until joy is vanished from the homes and haunts of human kind.

The next section (ver. 13 to the end of the chapter) may be headed : The Despair and Distress. "Gird yourselves and lament, ye priests ; howl, ye ministers of the altar. . . . Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, . . . and cry unto the Lord, . . . for the day of the Lord is at hand. And as destruction from the Almighty shall it come. Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God ? The seeds are rotting under the clods ; the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down ; for the corn is withered. How do the beasts groan ! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture ; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. . . . The flame hath burned all the trees of the field. . . . The water-brooks are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness." A tremendously powerful picture of a famine-stricken country, especially with that feature in it, *viz.*, the beasts driven, in their thirst, into delirium, uttering their moans, gasping and groaning in their appeal to God !

We come to the second chapter—Foreboding of Further Ill. In the opening section (vers. 1-3) we

first catch sight of the locusts. Once again he pictures the calamity to follow as a fresh invasion of locusts, but he states that as bringing in a day of judgment. God comes with His locust army. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain ; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble : for the day of the Lord cometh"—the day of judgment,—“ it is nigh at hand ; . . . a day of cloud and thick darkness, like the dawn creeping over the top of the mountain ; a great people and a strong, there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after them, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them ; and behind them a flame burneth : the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness ; yea, and none hath escaped them.”

Travellers and old classic books describe a cloud of locusts, a great, mighty mass of them, as the wind sweeps it along. The sunlight on their yellow wings makes a strange effect through the refraction of light. It is a striking image that Joel gives us—the first glimmer of the early dawn which crosses the tops of the mountains, the gray yellow light in the darkness. To us Londoners the extraordinary effect may be compared to that of a yellow fog. One has described it as “a fall of yellow snow” Here you note first the appearance of the locusts in the distance, next their nearer approach, and then the onset. Each paragraph begins with the image of the locusts, the impression they made on men’s minds, and ends with the effect actually done by them. In one paragraph the cloud of locusts is as a fire burning before and behind, the country in front like a garden of Eden, and behind a desolate wilderness. The next para-

graph describes their nearer approach, as the sound of chariots rattling over the mountain tops—"a strong people set in battle array." At the presence and sight of them the people are "in anguish": all faces grow pale.

You can feel the power of that image—the *sound* of them. You have heard fire in a house, eating, gnawing the timber. The people, at the sight of them, hear that awful, gnawing, devouring sound. Then here, again, it is the effect, of course, on the owners of the country: every face grows white.

The third paragraph, descriptive of their actual onset on the town, is considered one of the finest passages in literature. "They run like mighty men; like warriors they climb the wall; they march every one on his way; they break not their ranks, neither doth one thrust another. . . . They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth quaketh before them; the heavens tremble; the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining: and the Lord uttereth His voice before His army; for His camp is very great; for He is strong that executeth His word: for the day of the Lord is very great and very terrible; and who can abide it?"

Irresistibly you feel that this is a description of a real locust invasion, with its awful horrors. And yet, at the end of it, behind it, with it, in it, Joel confronts God and the moral judgment of our world.

Then follows the paragraph in which the prophet declares the possibility of forgiveness (vers. 12-14). "Yet even now, saith the Lord, turn ye unto Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and

with mourning : and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." Observe the tremendous strength of that declaration of God's eagerness to forgive and not punish.

Then comes a paragraph in which the prophet appeals to the people to unite in national contrition (vers. 15, 17).

Now I arrive at the second division, from the 18th verse of the second chapter to the end of the book. Here are the subdivisions of it. First of all (chap. ii. 18-27), Restoration of Prosperity, *i.e.*, of material prosperity. Ver. 18 should read, not, "Then *will* the Lord be jealous for the land," *et seq.*, as it is in our old Bible, but "Then *was* the Lord," *et seq.*, as you find it in the R.V. : for it is an historical statement. "Then was the Lord jealous for His land, and had pity on His people. And the Lord answered and said unto His people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith : and I will no more make you a taunt among the nations, but will remove the invading army of locusts, and drive them into the sea. . . . Ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you : and My people shall never be put to shame. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and there is none else : and My people shall never be put to shame." Mark the termination of that glowing description of mere earthly, bodily plenty and enjoyment.

The next section (vers. 28-32) relates to the out-pouring of God's Spirit and the advent of judgment. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your

daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions : and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit." That was an extraordinary declaration. Hebrew thought recognised that no slave could be God's prophet, because God's prophet must be absolutely at God's disposal ; and therefore that a prophet must be his own owner, a free man. The meaning of that declaration is, that God's Spirit, the full plenitude and Divine revelation of grace and goodness to Israel, shall obliterate all distinctions ; old and young, men and women, children, and slaves even, bond as well as free, shall be filled with God's Spirit. What is the result of that ? " And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered : for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as the Lord hath said, and among the remnant those whom the Lord doth call."

Those phenomena in nature, those portents to presage the judgment, may not be at all supernatural. Pillars of smoke, great clouds of the black smoke of burning cities in the land, darkening the heavens, the sun and moon shining blood-red through the panoply of smoke—these portents may be merely accompaniments of great human convulsions, terrible devastations of invading armies. But I rather think that Joel means more than that—*viz.*, that nature will be moved to its very centre when God treads on it for judgment.

We come now to the third and last chapter—The Guilt of the Heathen (vers. 1-8). Judgment is come. In it penitent Israel is safe. But what of the heathen nations? "Behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat"—meaning "Jehovah-Judge," the valley where Jehovah sits as judge. "And if ye recompense Me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense upon your own head." You know how they took the children of Israel and sold them into distant slavery, because a slave was ever so much more valuable when taken so far away from home that escape was out of the question. That is the Guilt of the Heathen.

Now comes the Judgment of the Heathen (vers. 9-17) in a very powerful passage. "Proclaim ye this among the nations; prepare war: stir up the warriors; let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. . . . Put ye up the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, tread ye; for the winepress is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." The blood of the grapes gushing out of the winepress is the standing image of carnage and the battlefield. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! for the day of judgment is near in the valley of decision. . . . The heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be . . . a stronghold to the children of Israel. . . . Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more."

Then, on to the end of the book, we have a picture

of the Final Consummation ; God's kingdom established, His people dwelling in peace and happiness, and all His enemies discomfited.

There are a number of questions about the prophecy of Joel. Some people think that the book is entirely a prophecy of things future, that from beginning to end it pictures what is going to happen. But the vivid, impassioned feeling with which the prophet describes the devastations of the locusts convinces us that he sees it before him ; he lives in it. There is another idea which ruled in the minds of King James's translators of the Bible ; and that is, that the whole of this book of Joel runs on one piece, and the second half simply states the people's desire that God would speak thus comfortably. The objection to that is, that it makes the book one of the weakest and most puerile productions. No Hebrew prophet, in such majestic language and thought, would ascribe to God what he wants Him to say : he knows what God has said, and he declares it in God's name.

Unquestionably the situation pictured in the book is this. The land has been scourged with terrible plagues of locusts, heat, drought, and famine. Joel thinks that worse is coming. Standing there, in the midst of the desolation around him, he sees the threatening future, passes on to the conception of the last judgment, appeals to his own generation to repent, succeeds, and then tells them the changed character of God's intentions to them, now contrite and conformable to the Divine will.

Another group of questions comes up in connexion with locusts. Who can read that book, and not feel that the prophet is describing real locusts ? But

there are a great many scholars who cannot be content with that idea. They say that these locusts are described as doing things which it is utterly beyond the power of locusts to do, just because they are described by an inspired poet and orator, whose heart and imagination is aroused to preternatural excitement by the horror of his time. But, more than that, they say these locusts represent the devastations of hostile armies. They cannot be symbolical of armies, or else how comes it that, in the second chapter, the poetical description of locusts choose the *imagery* of an invading army, describing how they assault the wall, spring upon it, and force themselves in anyhow, each marching on his own path? If locusts are symbolical of armies, then how ridiculous to describe a simile in imagery taken from the original!

Another idea is that the locusts are not natural locusts, nor symbols for soldiers of invading armies, but that the whole book is an apocalypse, like the Book of the Revelation in the New Testament, and that "locusts" represent some weird imagery grown out of the morbid mind of an over-excited seer or prophet. But Joel describes what he sees. The locusts are real. Hence that last theory is the most impossible of all.

Let us try to imagine Joel's position, and so travel along the train of thought that produced his splendid prophecy of the coming judgment. First of all, I am confronted with this difficulty, that we who live in this country have no conception of the horror and magnitude of the calamity involved in a locust invasion.

A cloud appears one morning on the horizon.

Men's eyes are attracted towards it. All the country around them is a smiling paradise of oliveyards, vineyards, corn crops, rich gardens; the pastures filled with sheep and cattle; men, women, and children fat, ruddy, and well-fed. The cloud draws nearer. It darkens the very skies, spreading out over illimitable space. Presently a terrible yellow glimmer begins to radiate through the sunlight. The inhabitants have all crowded to the ramparts of the town. They look with strained eyes and horror. A whisper begins to go round: It is the locusts, the dreaded locusts. The dark cloud comes on, like a great army swept on by the wind, veering hither and thither as the current changes, not guiding itself, but with that horrible suggestion of being a weapon held by some mysterious hand, controlled by the great power that is behind the elements, the forces, the winds, and the power of nature. For this was the most terrible thing of all in the locust visitation—the sense that they did not choose where they were to go, but were driven by the winds, by God. And so, almost more than anything, more than an invading army launched against the country by the ambition of a Persian monarch, the locusts were felt to be God's own army of vengeance. Onward the awful horde sweeps, dropping to the ground as it passes on, covering everything, gnawing grass, gnawing the bark of the trees, sweeping branches bare with tremendous rapidity—a slow, unceasing, steady, onward march of that frightful agent of utter consumption, of gnawing desolation, right over the country. Sometimes, when it is a comparatively small horde, it passes over a land, leaving a great riband of desolation, sharp-cut as our London fogs at the edge where

the locusts were driven on by the wind, on either side smiling gardens and vineyards.

An additional horror about locusts was this. Nothing could stop them ; nothing could destroy them. Ditches might be dug and filled with them ; still on they come, on they come, out of the hot wilderness of Arabia, swarm after swarm. Not merely food in its season, but young corn just springing is also destroyed ; the seed for next year is destroyed ; sheep, cattle, horses are deprived of their sustenance and perish of hunger. Into the gardens the invading hosts make their way. Everything they eat up, even the food stored for the winter. A visitation of locusts is not like a blight of fly that comes and destroys part of our flowers, or part of our turnip crop, or potatoes. It means famine—gaunt, horrible, cruel famine, gnawing at the very vitals of men. It means men and women going about with blue lips, holding in their laps their dying children ; the animals emaciated, mad with agony, dropping to die everywhere. The locusts after a time die too, creating a horrible stench ; and that coming upon depreciated health and an emaciated population, produces pestilence. A descent of locusts on a whole country, repeated month after month, threatens its people with actual extermination.

Who can resist the conviction that Joel stood in a land that had been scourged in that fashion ? The very power with which he pictures the horrors of such a situation carries conviction. All sounds of revelry, the merry song of the drunkards, the laughter, and jests, and huzzas in the houses, dead and gone ; silence all over the land ; at the very temple, no longer the smoke of the sacrifice is seen

curling up to God in heaven—the very breath of communication between heaven and men stopped ; the land lying under a religious ban, severed and cut off from God ; the necessities of existence reduced to the last degree of attenuation ; actual hunger, deathly starvation, confronting men ; beasts, men, women, everywhere perishing for want of food, for want of water ; and a horrible heat adding its horrors to the hunger and the desolation.

Remember the supernatural way in which God makes men prophets. It stands true to human experience that calamity like that stirs the depths of man's nature. Your materialist is shaken out of his materialism. Confronted with these uncontrollable, awful powers of nature, wielded so strangely—with the horrors, the reproaches, the accusations of an evil conscience backing up the dark forebodings and dreads, men begin to think of that world that lies behind and beneath this outer earth of ours. They recognise the moral forces—the forces of justice ; the forces of goodness ; the forces of evil ; the forces of righteousness, of retribution ; the great God over our world controlling it. When an awful flood occurs, as when a great reservoir bursts, or a mighty river overflows its banks, that is always felt to be a visitation of God ; or in an earthquake, when the solid earth heaves and trembles beneath their feet, men feel that this world is in the hand of Almighty God.

Joel, to whom God was a reality ; Joel, a man whose conscience, whose soul, had been rent with pain and agony because of the recreant worldliness of Israel, living in sensuality and self-indulgence ;—Joel looks on this visitation, blow after blow struck,

and feels in it the hand of God. It is not locusts we have now to do with: it is God Himself. Then there is this strange instinct in human nature. We feel that all God's judgment on earth grows out of one element, one attribute of the Divine character; it is all of a piece. Every blow struck against the world's evil, every disaster launched by the Almighty Hand against sinful men, is but the first blow of the great final judgment. In every great pestilence, in every great famine, in ages when the world has been convulsed by great wars, men have always been stirred by the tremendous thought of the last judgment. And so Joel, looking out, and seeing still more terrible swarms of locusts coming, carrying with them utter, final destruction, has his soul stirred within him; he hears God's voice, hears Jehovah marching at the head of the host of retributive ministers, and sees at the very threshold of his age the advent of final judgment.

And then, like every Hebrew prophet who feels that, bad as God's people may be, and utterly foolish, yet for an absolute certainty God has lived, wrought, and achieved great things among them—who knows that God has given them a revelation that might be the world's blessing, that God has laid the foundation stones of a heavenly kingdom on earth—Joel, with all that faith in his soul, knows the judgment must be averted, that God cannot mean the annihilation of His people, the thwarting and breaking of His own Divine purposes. And so, suddenly, Joel turns to the people, terrified by his awful, lurid pictures of the coming doom; and he declares to them, "Yet God is ready to forgive."

Ah! when judgment is actually begun, He will

still draw back ; He will pardon to the uttermost, if men will but repent, and obey Him. It is a striking doctrine, that. God repent ! God change ! Is not God eternal, sovereign, immutable in His will ? Yes, so He is. But the law, as the Bible teaches us, from the first page to the last, is that God changes every instrument towards us, as our attitude changes towards Him. Until the mercy of Omnipotence is exhausted, God will not suffer any creature He made to be lost : nothing but hopeless, persistent, irreclaimable impenitence can bring final judgment.

Another thing about the law of Old Testament prophecy is that prophecy is conditional, unless it be expressly stated to be absolute. Up to this point Joel has come. Suddenly, when the people repent, he says, " It is all gone." There is a fine remark made by Jerome : " It does not follow, because a prophet has foretold a calamity, that therefore that calamity shall come to pass ; for God's prophets do not foretell calamity in order that it may come to pass, but *in order* that God may be able to withhold it." That is the gospel conception of prophecy.

The people are penitent. Instantly Joel declares to them that God's attitude to them is altered ; and when they do repent, the first thing promised them is a superabundance of earthly and material prosperity. There are men who say that this is a degrading thing in Joel's prophecy, and they make a similar charge in regard to other parts of the Old Testament. Degrading ? Not a bit of it. I call it a fine thing that those Old Testament prophets did believe, with a tremendous conviction, that all earthly mercies come from the love of God. This is the doctrine we need to have preached if we really desire to have the love of

God in our religion, in our real life, and not in unreal life, *i.e.*, life artificially put on when we get into an ecclesiastical building. It would have been a degrading thing if Joel had begun with earthly prosperity and ended with earthly prosperity.

But what is the crowning climax and joy in that restored prosperity? It is the proof to Israel that God is with them once again. With them again, for what? To pet, and spoil, and pamper them? No ; to make them able to do their duty. That is a grand thing. What does material prosperity do to you? Does it make you selfish, indolent? To Joel and to the penitent people that were at his back, that outpouring of prosperity woke them to a sense of neglected duty. Ah ! they understood God's design in Israel was not merely to have them surfeited with food and drink. God has an ethical, a religious purpose in view ; for His people shall be made fit to accomplish His Divine purpose in the world's history. But Joel and the people felt that Israel needed something grander than that penitence of theirs in order to fulfil in this world all that was in God's heart. Israel must be transformed, sanctified, made perfectly conformable to the heart, and mind, and will of God. That, Israel could never do for itself ; that must come down from heaven ; that must be the gift of God. And so the prophet passes on to declare how, after Israel is restored, God will pour out His Spirit, fill every man and woman in the land with His own desires, His own impulses, His righteousness, His holiness, His truth, His goodness, His longings for the kingdom of heaven on earth.

The outpouring of the Spirit, what shall follow that? Judgment. The outpouring of the Spirit is

the precursor of judgment. Is that not a startling transition? Not at all. As soon as God's people have been divinely fitted to accomplish their task, as soon as God's servants are prepared completely to achieve His kingdom on earth, then the end of all things is at hand. The plenitude of the Spirit put into the Church means the *finale* of our world's history. In the *dénouement*, those who call on the name of Jehovah, and those whom Jehovah calls to be His own, pass through it unscathed and saved. The terrors, the retributive forces of judgment, fall now upon those who have remained persistently hostile to God and to God's kingdom.

That last chapter has in it some things that jar upon our Christian instincts. There is a certain vengeful delight in the thought of the destruction of Philistia, Phœnicia, and those other nations that have so harried Israel in the olden time. What of that? Why, that just means that the Old Testament has not in it the perfect sweetness, the fulness of Divine love revealed in Jesus Christ. And have we Christians got it?

I grant you this : a mechanical, an artificial, dead doctrine of Bible inspiration makes that into a difficulty ; but a real, living recognition of the inspiring Spirit of God in those old prophets, in those actual messages of theirs, involves no difficulty whatever. But to the men who raise difficulties of that sort, who bring such reproaches against Old Testament prophets, I will make answer thus : Never mind the mixture of personal anger in it. Mark what Joel believed and comprehended ! Mark the grandeur of that belief ! To him this world was not a great congress of physical forces, of vegetable life, of animal

life, where the nations were left to welter in their hostilities and ambitions, where every man had nothing higher to do than to grasp as much as he could of earth for his own selfish advantage. To Joel this world is a great drama ; the history of humanity is a tragedy ; this world is ruled and controlled by a holy, righteous God ; this world exists for the production of ethical, religious, eternal character ; this world is being sculptured into a kingdom of holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness, and love. I do not care how many defects and ignorances there are, I do not care how much of weak personal feeling mingles in Joel's declaration of that faith ; but I tell you what it is : All that is grand, and great, and heroic, and good in our world has grown out of faith in man's soul, often dark and obscure and ignorant—faith that this world belongs to God, is ruled by God, and shall at last be judged by God. Oh ! a faith like that in a real God, a God that cares whether we serve Him, or whether we do not ; a God that will take the trouble to reckon with us, and with our age, and with all the ages, and with this world of ours at last—that is a faith that lifts a man above himself, up above the world, and that stirs him to chivalrous and glorious achievements ; a faith that builds up the great realm of ethical glory and grandeur, of religious aspiration, and hope, and love ; the finest outcome of our world's struggle, and trial, and battle.

VI.

HABAKKUK.

OUR subject is the prophecy of Habakkuk. Very little is known about the writer of this prophecy. The title of the book is short, and does not tell us who his father was, or where he was born ; it does not tell us even when he lived and worked. It runs : "The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see." The name is unusual ; nobody else in the Bible bears it. It is supposed to be derived from a Hebrew verb, which means "to embrace" ; and ingenious scholars have tried to find some significance in the man's name. Indeed, there are commentators and critics who think that it is not a proper name at all, but an appellation devised by later editors to indicate the book and the form of it, and therefore that it specifies the character of the book. If the right word is the verb meaning "to embrace," then the name may mean "a man embraced by God," a man specially favoured, made His confidential friend by God. That would be the likeliest interpretation. Another suggestion is "the man who embraces God" ; *i.e.*, wrestles with Him, struggles to find out God's meaning in the actual course of events. A third suggestion concerning the interpretation of the name is that this prophet's special function among his own people was

to comfort them, and undoubtedly that is much the best way of indicating the special character of this prophet, *viz.*, "the comforter"; for it is a prophecy of the most extraordinary and pathetic comfort. In a book of Luther we read: "What Habakkuk does in his prayer is to caress his people and take them in his arms; *i.e.*, he comforts and cheers them as one caresses a poor, weeping child or fellow creature that it may be hushed and contented, because it shall soon, if God will, be better." Really, that homely passage puts you in possession of the key-note of Habakkuk's message to his time.

There are a great many ridiculous legends about the man in the old Jewish rabbis and the early Christian Fathers. They know, for instance, that he carried, in a supernatural way, food to Daniel in the lions' den; and they tell us where his birthplace was, and other things of the kind. One idea is that he was a Levite, and had to do with the musical service in the temple, because his book ends with a hymn that is set to music, as he speaks of "my stringed instruments." And because reference is made to "*my* stringed instruments," people emphasise the word "my," and think that Habakkuk himself played some musical instrument, a strange instrument, in the temple choir. I do not see that at all. I am very dubious whether "my" should be there: it is probably the plural, instead of the singular. We even have to guess the date of Habakkuk's book, the period when he lived and exercised his prophetic office.

Jerusalem is the metropolis that interested him. He is a prophet of the Southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judæa. The dates suggested from the pro-

phcey vary between 650 B.C. and fifteen years into the next century. But we may shut out all the extremer dates. Practically the question lies between the years 630 and 600 B.C. The outstanding thing in the prophecy that guides us to the era when it was produced is the fact that Assyria has disappeared. In the earliest prophets of the eighth century and the opening years of the seventh century, the great, stupendous empire of Nineveh is the world-power that confronts Israel and Israel's prophets. Now it is no longer Nineveh; it is the mighty empire of Babylon.

Moreover, I think the characteristic thought and emotion of the prophecy are best explained, if we suppose Habakkuk to have lived just at the time when the tremendous and imposing transfer of the world's sovereignty took place, the empire of the nations passing from the great city on the Tigris to the still more mighty metropolis on the river Euphrates. An event of that kind would stir the minds of men everywhere, but supremely it would raise up conflicting emotions in the breast of a devout Hebrew prophet. I am not, however, going to discuss the question of date, because there are far more important subjects to consider.

The two likeliest points where the prophecy may have been produced are these : During Josiah's struggle to establish a religious reform ; then it would be between the years 630 B.C. and 626. Or, again, just at the time when Nineveh was destroyed and Babylon began to show the tremendous powers it held for the conquest of the world. That would make the prophecy somewhere between 608 and 600 B.C. ; more likely near the latter date. One thing may be taken

as tending to show that Habakkuk prophesied before Babylon had displayed its immense resources and military might, and that is in the opening passage in the first chapter, where the Chaldæans are spoken of as if they were a new phenomenon in the world's history.

My own strong conviction is that Habakkuk wrote his book about the year 600; *i.e.*, between 605 and 600 B.C.

Now, first of all, let me put you in possession of the historical situation. When studying Hosea and Joel, we were in the eighth century, and in the Northern kingdom of Ephraim. Now we come down to the seventh century, and stand in the kingdom of Judah. The Northern kingdom has been swept out of existence by the empire whose seat was at Nineveh. The Southern kingdom had a comparatively prosperous period during the reign of Hezekiah, and a pure religion thrived under that good and benevolent monarch. His reign came to an end just at the beginning of the century. He was succeeded by Manasseh. During Manasseh's reign Judæa suffered a great many disasters, and was constantly buffeted by the Assyrian Empire. Moreover, Manasseh was a bad king. His sympathies lay with paganism. The religion of Jehovah was corrupted during that king's rule. Amon followed, and he was succeeded by a good king, Josiah, who reigned about 639 on to 608. Josiah began as a young monarch. He was confronted by the ruling classes of his father's time. These were all on the side of idolatry—a corrupt, depraved, and sensualised worship of Jehovah. Moreover, under the bad, loose, tyrannical reign of Manasseh, all sorts of abuses had been introduced; law had been perverted, justice

tainted ; oppression reigned everywhere ; poverty increased, violence and anarchy spread. The young king gradually got the reins into his own hand. He was backed up by one grand prophet, Jeremiah, and there were other noble statesmen, priests, and prophets supporting him. Gradually he formed a party for justice, for righteousness, for religious reform. At length, after he had reigned some eighteen years, he was able to give effect to his own resolves. He crushed the opposite, heathenish party ; he suppressed idolatrous worship ; *i.e.*, he decreed its suppression by law, and to a large extent accomplished it in fact.

Josiah had enforced the new *régime*, and carried it out to a great extent, and the succeeding portion of his rule was comparatively pure, and in a large degree prosperous. He began, in some measure, to recover the old power that used to be wielded by the great monarchs of the ancient time over the surrounding little states and nations.

I will carry the story a step farther, keeping to the internal history of Judæa. The Egyptian army undertook to force its way across Palestine, to strike at Assyria. Josiah imagined that good policy required him to resist the Egyptian advance, and so he went and barred the progress of Pharaoh-necho at Megiddo. It was most disastrous for him ; he was wounded at the very onset, and carried back to Jerusalem, where he died. On his death, all the good he had done crumbled to pieces. His successor, Jehoia-chim, was a king of a totally different character from his father, being weak and wicked. Of course there had always been the old pagan party in opposition during the latter half of Josiah's reign, but naturally

coveting their old position of privilege and power ; and so it happened they got hold of the heir to the throne, and, on his ascending it, reasserted themselves. The religious reforms of Josiah were reversed ; corruption, violence, and oppression recurred ; and mercenary adventurers and unscrupulous men were put into possession of power. The kingdom went from worse to worse.

Now to a man who had lived through those years of religious improvement, of moral and social amelioration, of gradual renewal of external prosperity—to a Hebrew prophet who had thought this the dawn of the coming final victory for God's kingdom, you can understand how tremendous was the trial of faith, when all the bright promises of a new day were dashed by storm and tempest, and a darker night settled down on the country than ever before.

Now I come to external history. During the latter half of the seventh century the Assyrian Empire had grown sick. A malady of weakness was spread through all its immense, gigantic frame. The central imperial grasp upon outlying provinces relaxed. The mighty empire was beginning to break up. And then, in the era of its decay, it was assailed by two formidable opponents, by the Persian power that had been growing up away in the Northern mountains, and again from the South by the rapidly increasing kingdom and state of Babylon. For a long time the old empire of Nineveh held out. It was a slow, protracted struggle. During, therefore, those closing decades of the seventh century the government of Nineveh had enough to do simply to defend itself from its own antagonists, from Persia and Babylon. The consequence was that those Palestine states that

used to be vassals of Assyria were able to reassert their independence ; and, among them, Judæa, under King Josiah, woke up to dreams of its old proud expectation of recovering its freedom and re-establishing the kingdom of King David. But it was not merely the Palestinian states that felt the paralysis away at the centre of the old empire of Nineveh. Egypt, that had played a subordinate part all along to Assyria, woke up to dreams, not of freedom, but of ambition and aggrandisement. There was seated on the throne of Egypt at the time a man of very great ability, remarkable breadth of mind, and boldness of initiative, Pharaoh-necho. He reversed the policy of his predecessors. Instead of shutting up Egypt by itself, he threw it wide open to Greek civilisation, science, enterprise, and commerce. He employed skilled Greek officers to remodel his Egyptian army. He enrolled in its ranks an immense number of "free lances," soldiers of fortune. He endeavoured to form powerful fleets, both on the Southern Sea (the Arabian Sea) and the Mediterranean. He actually conceived the magnificent idea of cutting a canal across the Isthmus of Suez, though not in the same direction as the modern canal ; it was to run by the Nile, and then to strike across to the Red Sea. He began that enterprise, which was to enable him to concentrate his war fleet either in the Mediterranean or in the Arabian Sea, and he actually carried the work on to a great extent. There is almost absolute certainty that his ships, manned and officered by Greek sailors, circumnavigated Africa, sailed down the Red Sea and by the Cape of Good Hope, and returned through the Straits of Gibraltar.

Pharaoh-necho, feeling the incipient paralysis away

at Nineveh, and perceiving the movements of the Palestinian states, determined to become their lord and master, and to suck their blood in war tribute. He commenced to attack them, was very successful in his endeavours, and at last, about 609 B.C., resolved to carry his conquest right on to the Euphrates. Poor King Josiah tried to bar his way, and was crushed in the attempt. Pharaoh-necho reached the Euphrates, and arrived at Carchemish. In the meantime, Nineveh had succumbed to Persia and Babylon. Persia took all the provinces of Assyria that extended away in its own direction. Babylon received as its share the provinces on the way to the Mediterranean.

There was a tremendous battle, and Egypt was utterly annihilated about the year 605 or 604 B.C. Babylon, having discomfited Egypt, thus rolled on in a triumphal march, taking state after state, town after town, establishing its ascendancy over the old dominions of Nineveh. And, when Jehoiachim found himself confronted with this resistless power, he too succumbed, and became the vassal of Babylon. For years after that Babylon ruled the world, ruled it with a rod of iron ; wielded a merciless, cruel, and rapacious sway over the conquered kingdoms ; crushed the very life out of them, and so acquired for itself an almost supernatural, devilish, and demoniacal character. It is an extraordinary thing that throughout the Old, on into the New Testament, the standing name and symbol for antagonism to God and goodness, to truth and mercy and justice, the embodiment of all that is fiendish and iniquitous and wicked in the ungodly world, is Babylon—not Assyria, but Babylon. It is a curious thing that, in the very first Bible notice of that great city, the building of the Tower of Babel,

the key-note was struck. That tower was built in defiance of God.

I will read you some poetry, which I find magnificently translated in a recent work on "The Book of Isaiah," by the Rev. George Adam Smith. It is a taunt-song or satiric ode, full of passion and powerful thought, written by a Hebrew prophet, who exults over the expected downfall of Babylon. This is how it runs :

" Ah ! still is the tyrant,
And stilled is the fury !
Broke hath Jehovah the rod of the wicked,
Sceptre of despots :
Stroke of (the) peoples with passion,
Stroke unremitting,
Treading in wrath (the) nations,
Trampling unceasing.
Quiet, at rest, is the whole earth,
They break into singing ;
Even the pines are jubilant for thee,
Lebanon's cedars !
' Since thou liest low, cometh not up
Feller against us.'
Sheol from under shuddereth at thee
To meet thine arrival,
Stirring up for thee the shades,
All great-goats of earth !
Lifteth erect from their thrones
All kings of peoples."

What tremendous passion, hatred, and satire there is in that !

I have shown you how the development of the internal history of Israel during that seventh century created a terrible problem for faith. Could the old promise be true? could Israel be God's people, the germ of God's kingdom? Then, again, the external

history created a more perplexing problem. During those years when Assyria was crumbling into decay, it looked to the Hebrew prophet as if God were fulfilling His promise ; now is the time for Judæa to reassert herself, to conquer Hebrew nations, and compel them to own the power of Jehovah. But, as Babylon came rolling on once more, there is the prospect of a long, dark, and unbroken night of degradation and subjection to pagan power. Could Israel be God's people ? could God be the living God, Jehovah ?

This prophecy throws a very remarkable light upon the fashion in which a Hebrew prophet received his supernatural revelation. Nobody can read the book and help seeing that light from heaven did not flash upon a prophet externally or mechanically. God's Spirit dwelt with the man's spirit as God's Spirit dwells with your spirit and mine. Through pain and perplexity, through wrestling with the actual problems of life around him, through the use of his intellect, but infinitely more through the use of his conscience, and best of all through purity of heart guiding a soul made true to God's great purposes in this world, the Hebrew prophet received those Divine intuitions concerning the world's course and God's designs that mark out the Old Testament as a supernatural, inspired book.

Let us trace the stream, the growth of emotion and thought, in this prophecy. Habakkuk looks upon the utter destruction of Josiah's reforms ; the downfall of pure religion ; the return of idolatry, the very worst kind of idol worship ; sensuality eating away the very fabric of social life ; injustice, unrighteousness, tyranny, oppression, breaking up the commonwealth ; and the questions confront him : " Is God

holding His people in His hands? is God, through Israel, building up a kingdom here on earth? How can that be true when Israel has, on the one hand, sunk down into such sin and guilt; and, on the other, has been brought into such utter subjection to a heathen power?" God very often answers one difficulty by showing you another. To be so unexpectedly confronted with this awful perplexity to faith, Babylon's sudden rise and resistless march onward in its conquering course, would have meant despair, it may be, to a half-hearted man. A man that had not entered into the secret of God's government of this world through moral forces, through ethical and spiritual powers, not through mere physical, brute force, would have succumbed. He would have said to himself, as the Moabite, the Philistine, and the Phœnician said, "There is no government of righteousness in this world. Force carries everything before it; our own gods are helpless before this tremendous Babylon; let us bow down before Babylon, and make the best terms we can; let us abandon all our patriotic hopes, all that was ideal, all that had a future, in the faith and aspirations of the nation." On the contrary, the Hebrew prophet looked at the unruly tide of pagan conquest, and said to himself: "That appalling instrument of penalty has been raised up by God; it is God's weapon of chastisement. This corrupt Israel never could fulfil God's design; and by terrible, bitter retribution, by degradation, by defeat, by humiliation, God will drive the people back to Himself."

Do you see the triumph of faith there was in that? But immediately a new problem for faith was created; for a just, good man, looking at the Babylonian

Empire, forecasting its course, detecting its character, could not reconcile himself to the idea that that was God's chosen minister of justice in the world. A Hebrew prophet had a very definite idea of what a divinely ordained king and kingdom and government, according to God's mind and will, ought to be. He had comprehended—and it is a grand thing in the Old Testament to find it there—the last secret of enlightened human philosophy and of political economy. He had comprehended that governments exist for the sake of the governed, not the governed for the governments. He had comprehended that power is put into men's hands, not for their own selfish aggrandisement, not for their own advantage or profit, but as a solemn trust. He had comprehended that every earthly rule is a part of the Divine administration, and has to be wielded according to the wishes of God, for the establishing of justice and righteousness, and the promoting of what is ethical, noble, and elevated ; not for ends that are low, degraded, and merely physical, however imposing such things may be made in their show of wealth, of wisdom, or of civilisation. He had comprehended that God means by rule on earth to promote happiness, to promote the prosperity of the whole commonwealth, not of privileged classes, not of a few tyrants, not of the monarch himself. With that idea of a true kingdom in this world, that faith that this earth was made by God, that over this confused world of ours, dominating its history, there is the great Divine heart, pure, and just, and righteous, the prophet, when he looked at Babylon, said to himself : “ Babylon cannot be God's kingdom ; this Babylonian conquest of the world is not God's last utterance in the world's story,

and therefore it must pass by ; therefore it must be a mere episode in the world's history." And so he fell back upon an audacious certitude of faith. He says to himself, and to the small band of faithful men and women that know God and love righteousness : " Because God is righteous, and wishes to make the world a realm of holiness, justice, mercy, there—in that realm—is the empire of the future ; and this Babylon must succumb before it." For Babylon was cruel and merciless beyond any empire ~~that~~ had gone before it. It went out of its way to crush, and destroy, and injure the peoples it conquered. It built up such a wealth, and fabric of luxury, and sensual indulgence in its mighty, magnificent metropolis, that it had to drain every blood-vessel of the conquered peoples in order to maintain its magnificence. It insulted all their national feelings ; it outraged their religions. It was not content merely to crush revolt ; it strove to make its domination as intolerable, as insulting, and as humiliating as it could contrive to do.

Here was the answer that came to the perplexed, doubting, agonising heart of Habakkuk, as he wrestled with the enigma, as the darkness fell upon his heart, as the old faith revived and rose up against it within him. Suddenly, a great light from heaven flashed through it all.

He saw a vision. The developments of time unrolled before him. He was able to forecast the story of that Colossus of the Euphrates, that mighty Babylonian Empire, and to foresee the future of the kingdom of God that was buried in obscurity in Jerusalem. He said to himself, and then he said to his fellows, that the vision stretched over a long

time ; that hope might be protracted and delayed before it came, but come it must, for it rested on the reality of God : the God of righteousness, truth, and goodness.

This is what he saw. " God ! not brute force, but God. The God that created this earth, the God that maintains, the God that rules it, the God whose purposes are sculpturing and carving out its destiny, is a God who, through and through, is a holy, just, magnificent, grand, generous, and merciful God. This God is a God spiritual ; a God ethical ; a God not of mere physical energy, not delighting in earthly magnificence, but finding a satisfaction to His Divine heart only in human character formed in His image : holy, just, pure, righteous, good. Therefore however long the issue may be in being decided, any man, any house, any nation, any world-empire that seeks only its own arrogant pride and ambition, its own cruel self-indulgence, its own earthly aggrandisement, at the cost of misery to mankind, of ruin and degradation to human character, is a defiance of God, an outrage on the Divine will, has against it all the eternal processes of God's government of the world, and therefore must succumb ; while the little handful of faithful souls that have known God and have entered into fellowship with Him, that love what He loves, that choose what He chooses, that wish this world made conformable to His will ; the just—however weak, impotent, bereft of all earthly resources, all military might, all wealth, all imposing show of power—nevertheless shall survive and outlive heathen empires, if they persist in their faith. Not material power, not intellectual conviction of the truth of any creed or dogma ; but actual fellowship with God

sympathy with Him, obedience to Him, being possessed of Him, the sense of belonging to Him on earth,—that is the faith which justifies to this day still."

With this master-key to the history of nations, Habakkuk penetrated through the external show of imposing, resistless power in the Babylonian Empire, and he detected the Divine emissaries of decay, ruin, and destruction that were beneath it and undermining it. The first thing that he recognised was this: Every forbidden appetite, every lawless, selfish passion carries in it the certainty of its own retribution, for this reason : because it is not regulated by God's law, because it is a thing monstrous and unnatural, and therefore cannot be controlled ; it masters the man who indulges it, like the thirst for strong drink, that the incipient drunkard never meant should be carried to such a dreadful extreme as to master property, health, home, life, everything. So Babylon's unrestrained lust of wealth, greed of power, appetite for self-indulgence, would drive it on and on until it lost all power of estimating proportion, until it ran to an unbearable excess, until it made this earth such a hell to its vassals that at last, like the outraged debtors of a cruel, bloodthirsty moneylender, driven to desperation, they should rise and crush the tyrant. That is a law of political economy that has proved itself by experiment over and over again in this world's story.

Moreover there is a strange, unavoidable retribution attached to ill-gotten gain. A man may coin it, a man may heap it up ; but a man never can build up stable peoples on earth with it, he cannot erect an abiding home for ill-gotten gain. This great law the history of man has writ large, and we see it in the

terrible retribution and vengeance which have fallen on houses and nations.

Here is another great law of God's government of the world. Wherever the life of an individual or of a nation becomes predominantly materialistic, holds, as its highest goals and gains, mere luxury and pomp of life, triumphs of invention, of science, of commerce, of industry, of poetry, of painting, of art, of refinement ; wherever a nation's life is engrossed in merely material ends ; wherever a nation has ceased to represent, and embody, and make patent in the comity of the nations some ideal principle, some ethical end or aim—*e.g.*, liberty, freedom, justice, mercy, virtue, religion,—God's wrath will fall on that nation : it will rot, it will decay ; it is already a *soulless* body, and its earthly life will vanish out of it rapidly. That law applies to individual men, to houses and families, to states and empires.

You see the shame of it in the expressions used in the passage to this effect : "The Lord has ordered it, that what the heathen peoples build is for the fire, and what the nations toil for is to end in desolation, in destruction." Go to the books that tell you what that mighty Babylon was—wealthier, vaster, than London is now—and read that passage, that inspired intuition of the Divine law of the government of our world, of the certain decay and ruin of a civilisation that has not within it a soul of ethical or spiritual potency, and beneficence for the good of the world around it ; and then you will feel that the Old Testament is indeed inspired.

Another great moral lesson of history is that oppression ruins the character, not merely of the oppressed, but of the oppressors ; *i.e.*, any unjust, any tyrannical,

any cruel exercise of power or rule in this world that spoils men's lives, that drives them to destitution or poverty, that robs them of their manhood. "Believe me," says Habakkuk, "it is not merely the victims that are injured; the worst moral harm is done to those who have injured, *i.e.*, the oppressors and the tyrants." Take slavery: do you think it was merely the poor slaves that were degraded in their manhood? The mightiest argument against slavery is the moral contamination and corruption of the slaveholders. How can one man establish relations to his brother man, loved equally with him by God, that involve the destruction of the Divine image in that brother, without making himself a brute, a monster?

Then last, and most wonderful of all, the root of all moral and political wrong and blundering is false religion. How came Babylon, with such a chance of being the executant of God's purposes, and of making a kingdom of God in this world, to fling away its opportunity? How came it to pass that Babylon was so blind to all the divinely imposed laws and conditions of a permanent and an abiding government? Because Babylon's gods were such wretched, degraded, foul, sensual, tyrannical, lawless, unjust deities, that could not govern their subjects beneficently, justly. And so Habakkuk ends with his mocking at these dumb, blind idols, that could give no true political guidance or social wisdom to their worshippers. He then reaches the mountain-top of his own faith and certainty.

Now do you see how the whole thought of the book rises up and bursts out with a tremendous glory of exultant music in that majestic poem that pictures

God's omnipotent, resistless sovereignty ; God's glorious march through the world's story in the past ; God's everlasting sovereignty still ; God's truth, justice, mercy ? Ah ! the explanation of Babylon's first triumph is Israel's unworthiness. God loves His people, but He loves righteousness more ; and therefore He will use that brutal tyrant Babylon to chastise His people, that He may have a people that will realise His kingdom on earth.

But, once again, the perplexity of the passing use of Babylon reaches its solution in the certain realisation of the living reality, power, and rule of that God who cannot look on iniquity, who hates, who recoils from, oppression, cruelty, sin, and lust.

In that poem all the elements—the contending emotions, the doubts, the fears, the hopes, the longings of Habakkuk's spiritual experience and wrestling for faith—find their complete, perfect utterance, and their triumphant consummation, in a quiet trust, which will not be dismayed amid the clash and fall of nations and of empires ; but which, when all the human props and supports of confidence have given way, can still rest peaceful and happy in the reality and being of God.

VII.

ZECHARIAH.

OUR subject is the prophecy of Zechariah. We know, from the title prefixed to the book, the exact period when the prophet lived and worked. It was in the second year of Darius, son of Hystaspes as he is usually called, to distinguish him from Darius the Persian, who lived a century later that "the word of the Lord" came to him. Judæa was then under the dominion of this Darius. The community of Jews at Jerusalem had only just returned from their exile in Babylon, and they were engaged in rebuilding their old homes, and bringing their old lands and farms into cultivation again. At that period, about 520 B.C., two prophets appeared. Haggai, probably the older man, was one of them ; Zechariah was the other. We do not know very much about those two men. They are both mentioned, and with honour, in the Book of Ezra, as true prophets. All that is told of Zechariah in the book which bears his name is that he was "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo." In the Book of Ezra there is "Zechariah the son of Iddo," and Berechiah is entirely passed over. But there cannot be a shadow of a doubt that both passages refer to the same man. The likelihood is that Berechiah died early, and possibly never became

the head of the house. And so, in the Book of Ezra, the prophet is spoken of as the son of his grandfather Iddo. We also know that he belonged to a priestly family, and that goes some way to account for the extraordinary interest he took in the Temple and in the priesthood. Beyond these simple facts we do not know anything about the man.

From the writings of Zechariah we gather with a great deal of probability that he himself was born in Babylon ; that he lived in that foreign land ; that he became acquainted with its imagery, its temples and pictures, and the statuary of its varied worship ; that he was familiar with its laws and its institutions, and with the whole organisation and administration of the Persian power. Moreover, it is extremely probable that at least the imagery in which he clothes his faith about the unseen world is imagery largely suggested and moulded by certain of the doctrines of the Persian religion. That applies to some of the visions we have to study, particularly to the parts in which Satan is introduced.

I come now to the Book of Zechariah. As we find the book in our Bibles—and, of course, also in our Hebrew Bibles—it appears as one book, and purports to have all been produced by the prophet whose name stands at the head of it, Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo. But, as a matter of fact, for more than a century now, the great majority of educated commentators, of Christian scholars, both of freethinking and the most orthodox, have been agreed that the whole of the book was not written by one man ; that, in fact, we have in it the writings of two men ; even, more probably, of three different men, and these living at very different times. No one reading the book with

any care can fail to perceive the reason there is for doubting the continuity of the work.

The first eight chapters stand by themselves, with a clear-cut character both in the language and in the thought, and in all the little references and circumstances that accompany the prophecy. The moment you pass away from the eighth chapter, and as you go on to the end of the fourteenth, you feel yourself in another atmosphere, in another world. Even in our English Bible, as we all must have felt, the language is different. It is a different literary style we are touching and tasting in the second half. In that second half there is another great breach of continuity—a wide chasm that you have to jump over. The first three chapters in that half, *viz.*, chaps. ix., x., and xi., make a group by themselves. Again, chaps. xii., xiii., and xiv. make a collection that stands by itself. Distinctions there are, much more minute. To appreciate them fully one would require to read the book in Hebrew. But still, a great many of them are quite evident as soon as they are pointed out. The consequence is, that a vast number of scholars hold that we have here the writings of two prophets. Others, again, say that you have the writings of three.

But it may be asked, how, first of all, did the idea spring into existence that our Book of Zechariah is a combination, a partnership? It was a very learned and devout Englishman, Joseph Meade, who remarked, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, a passage quoted out of our Book of Zechariah, which is said to have been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. That good man held a very rigid and orthodox theory of inspiration—a theory very common still. He was persuaded that Matthew, being inspired, could not make a

mistake ; that if Matthew quoted that passage as being from the prophecy of Jeremiah, then the chapter in which it stood belonged to Jeremiah, and not to Zechariah : therefore, said he, those Jewish rabbis who made up the canon of our Old Testament have blundered, and have put into the prophecies of Zechariah an utterance of Jeremiah. Some other good men felt that he was right, and so there came to be a general impression that our Book of Zechariah is not all of one piece : that it is a collection of different prophecies.

Then German scholars, who are so thoroughgoing, commenced to study the book, to see whether there were not other indications that it was not from the pen of one author. They detected all the differences and striking contrasts I have indicated to you. And so, before very long, nearly every scholarly man came to admit that the Book of Zechariah is not the production of one prophet.

Without going minutely into the evidence, there are certain great groups of arguments brought forward. First of all, there is a remarkable contrast in style. There are certain peculiar characteristic expressions in the first half of the book that do not occur in the second. The first section of it contains certain idioms, words used in a peculiar fashion, that do not appear in the latter portion. There is something more than that. The form is very different. The first half of the book is mostly written in plain prose ; the second half is gorgeous oratory, glowing, impassioned, fiery, almost exaggerated in its impetus and imaginativeness. The literary imagery too is very different. The first half of the book is, practically and entirely, a chain of visions ; and all

through them there runs an explanation by an interpreting angel. As soon as you get into the second half that angel disappears, and you have splendid descriptions of great things that are going to happen. Again, the first half of the book has various portions headed by a minute statement of the date when they were uttered, giving even the day of the month and the year. The second half has not that kind of heading, but has a characteristic superscription of its own ; *viz.*, "The burden of the word of the Lord." Now Malachi has a similar heading, and a great many of the best scholars think that Malachi was not the personal name of any man, but that it is simply a very ingenious catch-title appended to anonymous prophecy. That suggests the idea that there were three prophetic utterances without the authors' names, and that, when the canon of the prophets was being completed, they were put on at the end together. Old Hebrew manuscripts were not divided into chapters and verses, and were not separated by leaving half a page blank. Parchment was too valuable for that. And so it would be easy to run additions, from a different hand, on to a book or work that had an author assigned to it.

But there are more substantial reasons still. The first half of the book presents us with a most graphic picture of its stage or platform. It moves entirely in the period of the rebuilding of the Temple. It gives us the name of Joshua the high priest, of Zerubbabel, and the names of other people living there and then. Every part of it is directly aimed to get the people to do their duty in connexion with the building of the Temple. The moment we take a step out of the last

verse of the eighth chapter into the ninth we are far away at sea, we do not know where we are ; we have lost sight of all the landmarks, and get into a thick fog. There is no portion of the Bible that so hopelessly puzzles commentators as that second half of Zechariah. Therefore I shall keep to the first half ; it will be quite enough. For, as I have said, when we get into the second half of the book, and try to find any indication of the period in Israel's history to which it applies, there is most extraordinary discord. The first section of it, if we assume that actual occurrences are alluded to, would unmistakably belong to the period when Hosea was prophet : it is full of apparent references to the Northern kingdom, centuries back from the time of Zechariah. The second portion, again, contains almost unmistakable references, if they allude to actual events, and if they are not imagery—*i.e.*, imaginative statements of the prophet's hopes at a later time—to the age of Jeremiah subsequent to the death of Josiah. But all such argumentation is very dubious ; and here is a remarkable fact, that, just within the last ten or twelve years, there has been a sort of ebb of the tide. Previous to that time, nearly all scholarly commentators, with a rare exception here and there, said that the second half of the Book of Zechariah belonged to the early period of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Now a number of our leading critics are convinced that, instead of being earlier than the first half, prior to the Exile, it was written, not by our Zechariah, but by a prophet who lived a good deal later than he did ; and they produce an ingenious and a remarkable argument to prove that. What it is I cannot now explain ; but

before taking up the first part, I will tell you the present position of opinion about the whole book. First of all, there are a very few scholars who contend that our Book of Zechariah is a unity—was all written by that Zechariah who lived throughout the rebuilding of the Temple. I think that very possible. Though they are so few, still their opinion may prevail in the end. I will tell you why. Scholarly commentators too often lack imagination. They deal with a prophet as if he were a mathematician or an historian. I do not think that justice has yet been done to the amount of imagination—inspired, daring, literary imagination ; poetry, allegory, parable, imagery of every description—used in revealing God's truth. The second position is, that the first half was by Zechariah ; that the second half was earlier, and that the two portions of this were both prior to the Exile. The third position is, that the whole is post-exilic ; that the first half of it was written by the first Zechariah during the rebuilding of the Temple, and the second was produced either in the fifth or third century before Christ, or possibly in the second century before Christ. They are not agreed among themselves, these critics ; but they are persuaded that that second half of the book relates to the fortunes and misfortunes of Israel after the time of Alexander, possibly even during the period of the Maccabees.

Henceforth we confine ourselves to the first half of the book, *viz.*, the first eight chapters—a portion that is by everybody acknowledged to belong to the period immediately after the restoration ; and first of all, I shall give a sketch of the history and try to make a picture of the position of Zechariah. Then I shall give a rapid analysis of the book ; and, lastly, I shall

endeavour to delineate the working of the man's soul and mind, and his faith and aspiration.

After remaining for nearly seventy years in captivity in Babylon, the Jews were suddenly brought face to face with the glorious hope of a restoration to their loved native land. The Persian king Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian Empire; and, for some reason or another, he conceived great favour for the Jews. One of his earliest acts was to formulate a decree that gave them liberty to return to Judæa, to rebuild Jerusalem, and to restore their old Temple. Moreover, he granted them large sums of money out of the royal treasury and material from the arsenals. In the second half of Isaiah's prophecy, chapter after chapter glows with great expectation of coming delivery for the Jews. It pictures how their return would be rendered easy to them. Foreign nations would bring their treasures; alien kings and monarchs would compete with one another to do God service; and the second Temple was to outshine in magnificence the splendid Temple of Solomon. The Jews had waited all those years, their hearts and souls filled with these magnificent hopes. As they saw Cyrus grow in power, as they felt the Babylonian imperial fabric tremble and begin to crumble away, and as at last they saw it overthrown, their hearts became exultant within them. Then came the climax of their expectations, when the Jews were singled out for a wonderful deliverance and for unexampled privilege on the part of the heathen monarch Cyrus.

But we must not suppose that the whole of the Jews in Babylon were eager to get back. The mass of them had built themselves houses and cultivated gardens; they had acquired wealth in that rich

metropolis, and the last thing they felt an inclination to do was to sell everything and go back to poverty-stricken Judæa. Only dreamers, *i.e.*, men of faith, patriotism, religion, enthusiasts or fanatics, as some would call them ; men intoxicated with the glorious expectation of a magnificent career in the world's history, were prepared to make the sacrifice essential to their going back and re-establishing God's kingdom in the Land of Promise. The consequence was that a mere handful of the captive Jews returned, and when they reached Jerusalem they found the whole city a mass of ruins. They found their old farms and vineyards, their family estates, utterly fallen out of cultivation, covered with thorns and briars. Travellers tell us that in that country, unless the land is constantly looked after, it rapidly degenerates into complete sterility. To clear the ground and bring the land again into cultivation is, in these circumstances, a heart-breaking labour.

Then the Jews who returned were so very few and so helpless. But, it may be said, Cyrus had promised them magnificent grants out of the royal treasury. Yes ; but a number of officials, with open palms, thought Cyrus was foolish to waste his money in this way. Consequently there arose all sorts of intrigues, reports of probable insubordination, and plots, and conspiracies, from the greed of these treasurers and the rest of the official class. And so the poor Jews hardly got anything of that which Cyrus had promised them, and on which they had counted. But, like all men who do a great and noble action, they were animated by a splendid, glowing enthusiasm. Without enthusiasm you can do nothing great and noble in this world. A prosaic, prudent, shrewd man, who says,

"Stick to known facts," may look upon these enthusiasts as dreamers ; but it is the dreamer that has done everything. What a dreamer Columbus was ! and he discovered America. What a dreamer Martin Luther was ! and what a dreamer was Newton ! We have to allow something like a free hand and fair play to such people. Enthusiasm carried these Jews back to Jerusalem, and to illusions. They did not understand what a hard task they were taking up ; they would never have done it if they had. Those Jews thought they were going to be helped in all sorts of ways, and were going to restore Jerusalem easily. In that they found themselves mistaken, and despondency laid hold of them. There does sometimes come a certain collapse of hope, vigour, and faith, when illusions vanish away, and all the difficulties of a task confront us, when weariness of body, sickness of heart, and uneasiness of mind beset us. The first thing these Jews thought they must do, when they returned, was to rebuild the Temple. Though they did make a start before long, it took so much labour and expenditure to build their own houses, and to cultivate their fields, that they had no money left to rebuild the Temple. And so, gradually, the great work was left alone, and this neglect continued probably for fifteen or sixteen years. It may be said, "No wonder ! Who could blame them ?" And yet they would have spoiled their whole career if they had settled down in apathy. And the reason is plain. There was this deadly danger : they were getting to care only for selfish and worldly ends. No community can ever come to anything unless animated by enthusiasm in some noble work, which makes men lift up their eyes from their own fields, and up to God's

heaven, which causes their thoughts to soar away on into the future, in wonderful dreams for their children and children's children.

These Jews would no doubt have got rapidly mixed up with the pagan people that had crowded into the country round about, unless they had remembered that they belonged to God, and had recollected that God had directed them back ; that they were, there, God's kingdom on earth ; that it was God's city they were building ; that it was God's Temple they were to erect ; and that it was the faith of God and the love of God they were to make to shine in the world. If they had not remembered all that, their whole soul would have died out of them, and they would have fallen to the level of the poor heathen world. At that critical point, God's Spirit stirred two men to detect the danger, to rouse the leaders, and to animate the people to take up, with enthusiasm, their proper position in the world. Those two men were Haggai and Zechariah.

What makes a man a prophet to his own age ? It is not the adamant, unfaltering, absolute faith, put mechanically into him. A man of that kind is not in touch with his own time. The man that can speak to the shaking hearts and the faltering souls of his own generation must be a man who knows his own heart and soul, who has been troubled by the same difficulties that are troubling other men ; a man who has fought out his own battle with life's enigmas, has faced the darkness and reached God's light through it. That is the man who is in sympathetic touch with the doubting, failing, faltering men that are round about him. Therefore we must interpret a prophet in that fashion. We must never think of a prophet

as mechanically inspired, as not feeling the doubts he grapples with, as not tempted by the sins he denounces, as not knowing, himself, the depression and despair he battles against. He is a man of like passions with other men, tempted as they are, but by God's Spirit made victorious, triumphant, over dangers, obstacles, and difficulties ; and so, out of his own experience, armed by a faith won by himself in actual conflict, he can fight God's battle and become the leader of men.

Now if you take the prophecy of Zechariah, and try to feel for yourself just what the heart of his age needed to feel, you will find that each of these visions that flashed in upon his soul is simply the Divine triumph over a great doubt, or a great despair, or a painful paralysing question.

There are seven pictures in the vision. First, horsemen, who are couriers, scouts sent out to gather information for the government. In a valley of Jerusalem the prophet sees these mysterious horsemen ; he asks them for news, and they say all the world is quiet. The second is the picture of the four horns filed away by four smiths. This is the downfall of the world, or of the world-power hostile to God. The third is the surveyor. He is going to map out the walls of the Jerusalem that is to be rebuilt. It needs no wall. That passes on to a magnificent declaration that, in the glorious future, the nations will be gathered into obedience and loyalty to God. The fourth picture is the trial of the high priest ; the fifth, the golden candlestick ; the sixth, the flying roll, or national purification ; the seventh, the woman in the ephah, an embodiment of wickedness and ungodliness : a splendid, artistic picture. These seven hold together, but the vision terminates in what really is a separate

picture. What the prophet now sees is simply the break up that sends him to his work ; that is, the vision of the chariots, the Divine chariots. Then follows the crowning of the head of the nation as *the Branch*. The civil head is Zerubbabel, and I think it is quite certain that, for some reason or other, Zerubbabel has been slipped out of the paragraph relating to the crowning. If you look at the wording very carefully, you will see that two men have been crowned. It does not stand to reason that two crowns would be put on one priest's head. It is almost certain that Zerubbabel also was crowned.

Let us try to see how the thoughts, the subtle, pictorial thoughts, embodied in these images are precisely the inspirations that Zechariah's age needed in order to stir them to do their duty for God, and for God's kingdom on earth. The people had got enmeshed in the entanglements of mere external, earthly existence. Moreover there was nothing in the outside show of things to make it easy for them to believe that God had some great thing for them to do in the world. In every shape and fashion, in every portion of the secular and religious organisations, things were sordid, poor, and disheartening. For instance, they remembered those glorious declarations of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, and of Ezekiel, the prophets of the Exile, how God would make the world shake to its very foundations, to break down all hostilities against His people and His kingdom, how God would pour the treasures of the pagan people into the arsenals and the building enterprises of restored Jerusalem. With all those recollections in their hearts and minds, they looked round, and they saw the world utterly unconcerned about them ; every-

thing lying in ignoble heaps ; nowhere any commerce, any custom. Robbed by the Samaritans of their poor harvest, and harried in their expeditions for timber or stone required for building, it looked to them as if this world were empty of God. I believe Zechariah felt the agony of that doubting and that questioning ; and he wrestled with it. He awoke within himself by prayer, by noble aspirations, all that inner core of spiritual nature where God resides in every man ; and so at last there comes to him, with all the power and vividness of vision, a revelation, suddenly, in the darkness of his age. Out of that great dumb, silent, inert world, from every quarter of the compass, there appeared mysterious, supernatural, Divine emissaries. All at once, beneath the poor, external, physical surface of this world, beneath all its ambitions and greeds and mere earthly endeavours and enterprises, the prophet felt the great controlling cords of God's interest in it. God cares for every part of the world ; God holds all the reins of government in his hands ; God keeps Himself informed of what is proceeding. It is not merely the poor community at Jerusalem, not merely Zechariah, that watches the hard, cold world. God at the centre, God come down there to Jerusalem, waits for news, eager as they were for the time to come when the whole world should be shaken as by earthquake, when all resistance to God's kingdom would be struck down, and when the city of God might be built once more on earth.

Here was a man who, by the power of his personality, by the grandeur of his character, by the strength and resistless conviction of his own soul, could pour out an impassioned story of a Divine vision

like that, to people who did yet feel that God had spoken in the past, that God might still speak to them. Think of it, the inspiration, the enthusiasm there was in this sudden stripping off of the every-day surface of things, this making people feel that the world is pervaded by Divine interest, is held and moulded by the Divine will, and is being governed, all of it, for that very end and aim for which they have made sacrifices, for which they have suffered, and have been impoverished at Jerusalem, *viz.*, the building up of God's kingdom on earth.

But then doubt arose. Looking at the tremendous bulk of those world-empires in their vast, gigantic strength ; with their mighty military organisations and their overwhelming wealth ; with their teeming cities and capitals ; with their great kings ; with their civilisation ; with their art and their learning : men would say, how can a poverty-stricken Jew, living in his own solitary little home amid those wasted ruins of old Jerusalem, one of a handful of despised people that cannot build their own Temple, how dare such a man believe that the world's future resides there, in that sordid, despicable, impoverished community, hiding in the ruins of their capital? The answer comes in that vision of the prophet, and it is this: "Do not look at mere physical bulk, at the imposing massiveness of material wealth or power, at the gigantic stature of immoral, godless civilisations, standing out like four great iron or brazen horns. Look rather at these invisible, awful, spectral forms that are slowly filing at these horns of the world's power and antagonism to God and to His kingdom." It meant the flashing into vision of the great law of God's government of this world ; it meant that the world, in orga-

nisation or in empire, rests upon a godless basis, that it exists for selfish, unjust, tyrannical ends, and is not advancing the people's real good. Those awful, subtle, moral energies of God's hatred—the hatred of that God who, through all the external organisation of our world, is seeking righteousness, justice, holiness, ethical, spiritual being—are undermining and eating away the roots of the world-power, which suddenly totters and falls.

But, once again, a devout-hearted Jew looks round on those demolished walls, those vast, immeasurable ruins, those heaps of rubbish, where stately palaces formerly stood. He looks at the Temple, now with blackened, charred beams lying beneath overturned stones, all disfigured and overgrown with thistles. Despair comes into his heart, and he says, "Can it ever be built again?" Zechariah met that by an audacious grandeur of faith. "Built again? No; it shall not be built again. The new Jerusalem shall outstrip the old Jerusalem immeasurably. Walls? Why, no walls that man can build will hold that future city of God. Illimitable and immeasurable in its vastness, guarded by God, made to grow by God, dwelt in by God, towering above all structures, civilisations, and powers of this world, inhabited by God's Spirit, radiant with His holiness and the attraction of His just, righteous judgment; it shall dominate the world, and all the nations shall be gathered to it."

Yes; but once again, there is a doubt that comes to the heart of faith entered on a new life, dreaming of doing God's will. "Can the past be undone? What of that awful guilt, that entail of retribution, which grows out of sin, error, ignorance, transgression? Does not a man's poisoned, diseased, wicked

past, dog him to the end, and drag him down? Can a great sinner be restored to such an acceptance with God that he dare hope to be God's servant, that he may lift up his eyes to a stupendous, Divine task, and count himself heaven's minister to do it?"

In that vision of the religious head and representative of the community, the high priest, the man who goes into the holy of holies once a year to make atonement that the nation may be accepted by God, how finely the Divine answer to that doubt is pictured! How the doubt figures first in this picture! The high priest and the hearers' hearts sink within them. The high priest stands before God's throne of judgment. The accused defendant is clad in defiled, torn, sordid garments. Over against him appears the power of all malignity, the power of all evil, the devil, who charges him with his past. Ah! how the people listen for the verdict! and they hear it in the voice of God: "Be thou rebuked that doubted whether a man can get rid of his guilty past, that doubted whether a man can be taken to be God's servant because of the years wasted that lie behind him!" That doubt comes not from the voice of God; no, but from the devil: hell is in it, and God's hand stretches forward to strike it down. Be silent, doubt of hell and of the devil: be silent for ever!

That accused, attacked, slandered, charged defendant, in his filthy, sordid garments, is he not, by his very presence there, by his existence, by his escape from death, from destruction, a brand plucked from the burning, charred, maimed, burned by the blunders of the past? Yes. But a brand plucked from the burning, that means a brand which has work in it, is capable of noble uses, is of value to its owner, to him

who plucked it from the fire. O poor, restored Jewish community, doubting whether God means anything great for you ; how came it that Cyrus delivered you ? God plucked you out of the burning ; but do you think that God would have done all that, if He had not a great future for you ? They feel not man's power, but God's doing—God's grace begun in the worst of transgressors ; and that is God's guarantee of heaven and of the whole of His kingdom.

Then we come to the second of those two series of visions, dealing with a different class of doubts from those in the first three visions. The next difficulty, a universal difficulty that we all experience, was this, to detect within frail, erring human personalities Divine powers and purposes. It is the tendency—so paralysing, and yet so difficult to withstand—to despise your present. We people the past with heroes. We dream of a future full of heroes. But how blind we are to the heroes of our own day and our own time ! We drive them out. We think they are not worthy to be in the world. We persecute them. We crucify them, or we mock at them. It is only after they are dead and gone that we build their monuments. It is a universal blunder. It is a deadly error. We make it in our own homes ; because of the homeliness of many a sweet virtue and true affection, and because of the faults and imperfections that attach to their embodiment, we often never know the government of God that is within it till it is gone from us. That was precisely the difficulty of the Jews. They looked at their high priest : his garments were not so splendid as those of Solomon's high priest ; their high priest had no grand Temple, no splendid altar, no hecatombs of beasts. You see, it was not the high priest, nor the

princes, that stirred the people to build the Temple ; but it was two outsiders, two prophets. Those Jews despised the day of small things—small priest and small king. What can come out of this ?

Once again, with prophetic insight, Zechariah could look through the shows of things ; just as we, with natural insight plant an acorn, and what our little child despises grows before our eyes to a spreading oak. Zechariah saw the national life, its existence, its purpose in the world, lit up by God to illumine the world, in the image of the seven-branched golden candlestick, the flames fed by a bowl of oil at the top in the centre. The bowl holds so little that the oil will soon be done. But, just like mysteries not seen in this visible world, there grow by its side two olive trees, rooted in the vegetative life that ever anew realises the will and power of God, producing oil day after day and year after year ; and from those two trees two channels feed that bowl of oil with a never-ending supply of divinely given sustenance. The prophet looks and looks, and he wonders, What is the meaning of it ? The answer is that the candlestick represents the nation's future, the oil that shall make it burn the grace of God—the grace of God given to it as a religious community, the grace of God given to it in a wise, just, strong, secular government. This, surely, is a lesson to all times ! Translated into the speech of to-day, one of its meanings is that the philanthropist must believe in his own reform, when the common people thwart him, and when the politicians that he drives to carry it out are seen by him plainly to be selfish men, and by no means over-noble.

The last two visions purpose not so much to meet a doubt as to avert a danger. How shall Israel reach

this glorious future? In one way only : by becoming the willing, docile, perfect instrument of God. Of God, in what respect? As the subject? As the subject of an elaborate theology and mysterious explanations about His work and nature? No ; but God, the just, holy, loving King of men. God's kingdom ! In Hosea, Joel, Habakkuk, in every page of the Bible, God's kingdom consists not in meat and drink, not in ritual or ceremony, not in doctrine or dogma. God's kingdom and the light of God in man consist in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, loving our neighbour as ourselves, making our own life clean and helping to make our neighbour's life clean. Ah ! the day will come when incarnate wickedness and ungodliness in its entirety shall be by God driven clean out of the land, and His kingdom shall be pure, holy, peaceable, the home of love, truth, justice, mercy, and righteousness, even as God Himself is in heaven.

Thereupon the prophet's eager heart springs to the perception that, though the work may take long, it has already begun. The last judgment will be a last judgment, but it is going on already ; it is in process ; God is governing the world. Surely the Jews will take heart, and will not be found with their Temple unbuilt, their faith in ruins, when suddenly God's work of judgment and righteousness in the world flashes forth, and the time has come to finish His kingdom !

It is easy to say that Zechariah is a great deal concerned about external things, and fanciful in throwing all his teaching into these visions, and that he expects the conversion of the world too largely to be done by force. Supposing all that were true,

what was there at the centre of the man's faith? What was the animating principle and power of his whole life? What was it but the tremendous, daring belief that the most important of the world's population in that era was the handful of Jews at Jerusalem; the absolute conviction he held that that little community would do more in the future history of the world than all the mighty empires around them? A great philosopher has said that, in the age when they lived, those fanatical Jews, with their monstrous dream of their destiny in the world's story, must have seemed like drunken madmen amidst sober men. Now look back on that faith of theirs, and over against it look at the arrogant, the haughty, proud, vainglorious Egyptian monarchs, the Babylonian monarchs, the Persian monarchs, the Greek conquerors, who spoke of subduing the world. They are dead and gone, and vanished from the world's real life; while the faith of those Jews, the morality of those Jews, the religion and life of those Jews, dominates the civilised world, and those men who seemed fools, madmen, and drunken men in their own age now stand out the sober, sane men, amid madmen and drunkards and fools.

How came that wretched, small, despised people (eventaking them in the time of David) to dream such a dream, to hold fast to it, when by their own folly they had destroyed every apparent chance of their realising it? How came they, when their national life was broken up, and they were scattered among the heathen, still to believe themselves to be the destined masters of the world's thought, civilisation, faith, life? How came they to expect to accomplish their destiny by force, or by devotion to ritual, in ways that were use-

less and impotent? How came they to so blunder about the fashion of that kingdom that, when the real King did come, they did not know Him, but persecuted Him, cast Him out, rejected Him, and crucified Him? How came it that their strange dream, in spite of their doing all they could to destroy it, has yet come true? I know no other explanation but this : it was God's doing, and it is wondrous in our eyes.

SERMONS.

I.

THE INCARNATE WORD.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”—I JOHN i. 1-4.

THE opening paragraph of this epistle is constantly read as though it were a piece of abstruse thought. It is taken to be a profound and elaborate statement of certain very awful and mysterious doctrines about the Godhead and the person and work of Christ. Theologians take it to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, the eternal Sonship of the Second Person, and the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, and so on. Now, that is a fair and proper use to make of the passage, if we are to have an intelligent statement of what we do believe about God and about Christ ; but yet I cannot help thinking that when John wrote these things he was not thinking at all about any difficult and perplexing

doctrines. The feeling and the ideas which he wished his readers to have were of quite another order ; else I cannot understand why he concludes the passage with this declaration : " These things write I unto you, that your joy may be full." Now a skilful metaphysical demonstration, or a clear, consistent and powerful theological statement, are quite capable of exciting one's intellectual interest. They may, besides, throw a man's spirit into a mood of worshipful awe. He may even have a spiritual satisfaction and contentment in the reasoning and in the results ; but theology, or metaphysic, or logic, or argument, or difficult and abstruse revelations about the essential nature of God, these are not things that peculiarly make a man's heart to flow over with gladness and delight. One would hardly say at the end of a declaration of this sort : " These things I speak to you, that your joy may be full." You rather expect that joy should be inspired by speech full of plain, simple, homely, and heart-felt happy thoughts, that ignorant men and women and little children might understand and be comforted and delighted with. Therefore, I argue that John must have been speaking, not about things hard to understand, but things easy to understand ; not about theoretical principles and truths, not about profound and awful dogmas ; he must have been addressing men's hearts rather than their heads. He must have been telling them things that had to do with their daily actual life—things that would touch their great sorrows, and pains, and fears with light and love, and soothe their hearts and heal their wounds, and fill the darkness of their life with sunlight.

Now it is a very proper use to make of this pas-

sage, to take it and use it to establish the doctrines of our evangelical faith ; but if a man allows that employment of it to prevent him using it as John wished it to be used, he is guilty of a very great sin and a very great folly as well. It looks to me a little like taking the children's bread and turning it into a stone.

Now how shall we ascertain the keynote of John's purpose, and of his thought, and of his heart-feeling, when he penned these words. I think the best clue to it lies in the very peculiar composition of the passage, in the unwonted strange and puzzling grammatical structure of the sentences. If you have listened carefully, as I read it, I think you must have remarked this : that, unlike most of John's writing—unlike the larger part of the Bible—the style is cumbered with what (you think at first until you see through it) you are tempted to call a useless repetition, reiteration, and reduplication of intensely materialistic physical language and declaration in the most minute detail. Listen to it : “ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life.” Surely that is enough. “ For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us.” Is he done now? No. “ That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.” What is the meaning of it? Is it awkwardness? and did John lack literary aptitude? Did he write to give happiness to wounded hearts and consciences? and did he comprehend that the most beautiful style for that was one that was never done repeating the

things that they longed to believe, and to know about God the Master of all? Does the whole value and preciousness of his testimony in that passage lie in this : that what he asserts about God, he knows by the touch of his hand, by the sight of his eye, and by the hearing of his ear ; so that it is real, and actual, and intelligible as the common things of our secular world ?

Now I have thought that the very best way in which I can put, to the best of my ability, the light, and meaning, and comfort, and heart back again into those words that poured out, warm and glowing, from the great loving heart of the beloved apostle, is by asking your leave to induce you to use your imaginations a little by making a picture of the church where John used to preach those words and expound them. There will be a great deal of fancy ; but those of you who know a little about the early Church history, and those of you who know the real world, with its evils, and sorrows, and perplexities, and fears, will easily comprehend what I wish to illustrate. After the death of the Apostle Paul, John settled down in the town of Ephesus, in Asia Minor, and became the stated pastor of the church. Sunday after Sunday he preached his sermons to the people, who gathered together there to worship God and to listen to the things of Christ, and have them brought home to their hearts, and carried into their life by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. In the course of time John came to be old and weak, and a partially infirm man. During those years a very sad thing had happened in the churches of Asia Minor. All round about, and partially in Ephesus itself, differences of opinion sprang up—teachers appeared who taught a gospel

that was not quite the gospel of Paul, of John, or James. It grieved the old apostle's heart—it grieved the hearts, too, of the people of Ephesus; and so, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it occurred to them that if the revered, beloved disciple of the good, great Master were to write a letter to the other churches, and to have it copied, and a copy of it sent to every town and to every congregation, that might do a great deal to allay strife and shame heresy out of Christ's Church. So it was suggested to John that he should write down, or dictate to a scribe, just these thoughts, the favourite thoughts of his own preaching—those bits of his sermons that had been most helpful, most comforting, most enlightening, most strengthening to his own people. That was done, and the result is this First Epistle of John that we have in our New Testament. It is just a brief, condensed summary of the heart and spirit and real substance of John's preaching. Therefore you and I can tell with a very great certainty what kind of people would gather on a Sunday evening in that church at Ephesus; for we know what they came to hear, what they loved to listen to, what they drank in and believed and rested their heart's hopes upon. Therefore (I mean as if we had known them personally in the flesh) we can tell the lives they lived, the battles they had to fight, the aspirations that lit up the darkness of existence for them, and what, above everything else, they needed to know about God. Well, then, if you will read John's epistle, you will see it is very plain that the people who gathered together in that place were not always or altogether comfortable, easy-going, prosperous men and women, who lived in the sunlight of the world's favour and

wealth. No doubt there were some of these, but I suspect the majority had a very different experience—a fortune, a career just the opposite of that. There must have been in John's audience (and he knew it) men and women for whom the world was dark and dreadful, who could not possess an easy, undoubting, unquestioning faith ; men and women poverty-stricken, wronged, injured, their hearts fired to strong passion and hatred against the wealthy, the cruel, the selfish ; men and women there who, as they looked round on the violence, the cruelty, the passion, the disease, the death of human life, asked if there could be a God that made mankind to suffer like that, and leave them in their misery, in their pains, in their sin. You can fancy to yourselves how, on a Sunday night after a great storm, there might be in John's congregation a man who, the evening before, had stood on the lofty cliffs by the seashore near the port of Ephesus, and had watched a poor ship driven by the relentless winds and waves, bit by bit, nearer and nearer, to the sharp rocks amid the white breakers down below. He had seen the horror-stricken faces of the men and women and the little children on that ship ; seen their struggles to save themselves ; watched till at last the ship struck on the edge of the sharp rocks and broke into pieces, and spilt those poor human souls into the black waters. He had seen their hands reached up in agony, and their white faces sinking down beneath the waves, and the sky was mute and cold, and there was no answer to their pitiful cries for help. God kept silence. Ah ! and a man would need to have a faith of adamant who could look on a scene like that and not come away with a white face and with set lips,

and with a terrible question in his heart whether there is any One up there that cares when men perish, or, if He knows it, does He pity? does He love? And he sits there in the church to-night because he has been told that this preacher knows more about God than other men. He has come to see if he can answer his question; if he can assure him, by his own personal knowledge, that God's heart is compassionate, that God pities and saves.

And you and I can understand, because of what our eyes have seen in our own churches, how there might well be on that Sunday evening in the church at Ephesus, away back in a place where she would be out of sight, a woman clad in black, sitting there all alone—no husband by her side, no son, no little daughter to hold her widowed mother's hand and make the church feel home-like to her. A poor woman, who has lost her husband, and child after child, till they are all gone; and yesterday she followed the last of them—the youngest—to the dreary churchyard; and all the night through the wild storm she has lain alone in her bed, her heart full of sad thoughts of the dear ones that are gone; and she asks if they are safe in the arms of a great and tender God that will be gentle to the little ones that have gone from her; and she has come there to-night to see if in all God's world there is a man that knows, that has seen and touched God, and can assure her that God's hand is soft, and His heart full of love to the dead.

And there must have been sometimes in that church a man young in years but very old in experience, his life only begun and yet it looks as if it were well-nigh done. He had lived fast, he had been gay,

reckless, foolish ; but now he had spent all his money, and he has lost his friends, ruined, disgraced, baffled in heart, in purity, in manhood, in strength and vigour, in hope, in faith, in love ; and he has been thinking of his childhood's home, and the face of the dead father and the dead mother have been looking at him, and he has been wishing he could live over again. There was none to hold out a hand of help, or speak a word of consolation to him. There is no brightness in the past, no peace in the present, for such as he, and the future is lowering with a glow that looks like the fires of vengeance and retribution, and his sins haunt him like spectres, and he asks the horrible question if a man who has wasted and ruined his life can have a chance again. Ay, there is a God to punish, but is there a God that pardons—pardons a ruined, repentant sinner—and he has come to that church where they tell him there is a man who knows all about God. Ah ! it must be a man that knows for certain, a man that does not speak of hearsay about God, a man that does not work out and reason out what God is, a man who knows God as one man knows another.

The hymns had all been sung, and the prayers said, and the chapters in the Old Testament read by the deacon, and now the eyes of the congregation all turn to the white-haired old man that sits by the side, who is to speak that night. He sits there with a far-away absent look on his face as though he sought other sights and other scenes, forgetful of the place, the time, his duty. But at last the presence of the hushed, expectant silence rouses him, and slowly he rises, but still with that far-away gaze in his eyes. He comes forward, and looks at the men and the

women he is going to tell about God ; and at last he begins to speak, and this is what he says : " That which I have seen and heard, that which I have touched, which these hands " (holding up his thin, old hands) " have handled of the Word of Life, that which I know, that which I beheld with these eyes, that which I held in these hands of mine, that I have touched, and listened to, and looked upon, and know, know absolutely, beyond all possibility of mistake, of the life eternal that is hidden in the great heart of God, that came out of God's heart, and lived, and moved, and breathed, and spoke on our earth, that which I have seen, heard, touched, handled, of the very being and heart of the unseen God, I am going to tell about ; " and then I think, seeing some faces there that were white with grief, pained, and drawn with sin and remorse, rent with anxious questions, doubts, and perplexities, he looked at them and said, " Poor troubled souls, I am going to tell it to you that your fears may pass away, that your hearts may be comforted, and that your joy may be full." And then he would go on speaking to them like this, he would say : " I know just how you feel, bent down and bowed beneath the burden of your guilt, looking forward to death and judgment with fear and dread. I know how you feel, poor, lonely, desolate hearts, that have watched by a bed where your loved one lay, and died, and went away from you out into the night and the wild storm, asking if there is a home for the dead, where they are at rest, a Father to take them to His arms. I know how your hearts are full of anguish, pain, and disquietude, you who see the misery, the ruin, the evil, the darkness of life, and cannot be sure that there is any God, pitiful, com-

passionate, and loving. I know, for once I felt it all myself, the tears used to flow from my eyes for pain and sorrow, for the sins and griefs of men, and for my own, and I too shrank back from death's darkness, and sought to rend that icy heaven, to pierce the blackness and look on the face of God, to know if the great heart that made us is hard, or gentle, pitiful, and kind. One day there came into my life a man such as I had never met before, a man in whom the very breath and Spirit of God seemed to dwell ; he was so pure, so noble, so holy, sinless, generous, brave, tender, and loving. Oh ! he had in his heart a love for every human creature greater than that of a mother for her little child, and he was so patient with our sins, and so pitiful in our sorrows, and it lifted up the load from my heart, and all fears and aches stole away when he was by my side, and I felt as though God were very near, and very loving, and very gentle ; a God to lean upon and love, to comfort, to care for, and save. Ah ! it was unutterably good, and helpful, and happy, to have him with us, to think that in this poor, sinful world there was a man like that. But since he has gone away back to God in heaven it has all grown grander and greater, for now I know it was no mere man, that in that man there was the very heart of God ; and like the radiance of the setting sun that pours back a flood of crimson and burning gold, bursting through the dull, chill clouds of the evening, down from heaven there streams in splendour through all my memories of that sweet fellowship with him, the great majestic thought that my Friend, my Master, my Saviour, was not a man only, but held in him the whole heart of God. And now when I sit alone in the firelight, and

my memory travels back to those years of companionship with him, the pictures rise one after another and they fill my soul with sunlight, and I am going to show you some of them. I remember one day a splendid banquet hall, and round the stately table the guests were arranged, and among them He reclines; and presently into that wealthy hall there steals with downcast head and trembling footsteps a poor, outcast, fallen woman, and she creeps up behind Him, falls at His feet and covers them with tears, and she wipes those feet with her hair and kisses them. He turns to her and does not bid her away, but looks at her with such love, and with such hope, and with such power of grace, and tells her that she has loved Him much, that her sins are forgiven, that she is to go in peace, to be a good woman, and to come at last to God. And as my heart rises within me with exultation, and I am ready to cry, 'Oh! generous heart, oh! noble, loving man,' a hand falls on my shoulder, and the solemn finger points and a great voice says, 'That was no man;—that was God.'"

"Another picture I can see. Beside a new-made grave two women stand, their faces wan with weeping, their heads hanging down with sorrow, clad in black, and He stands by their side, and when He hears their sobbing He turns and looks at them, and His face begins to work with pity. Suddenly His eyes run over and the great tears roll down His face, and He turns to that grave and in a mighty voice calls their dead, loved brother back to life and gives him to them. But as I cry, 'Oh, great and noble and pitiful heart!' the solemn finger points and the great voice says, 'That was no man;—that was God.'"

"Once again I see another scene. Three bitter

crosses on which three men hang dying, and in the midst He hangs, blood-stained, pale, and dying, and His companions revile Him, taunt Him, and deride Him ; but at last one of them, silenced by the majesty, the holiness, the heavenliness, of His face, hushes his taunts and jeers, and at last turns his eyes to Him with such a look of entreaty in them, and in a broken voice says, ' Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom,' and He turns to him and looks at him with joy and love and triumph in His face, and says to that dying, sinful thief : ' To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise ;' and as my heart runs over with tears of admiration and of love, I cry, ' Oh ! gentle heart, oh ! most forgiving, most pitiful of men,' the voice comes and says to me once again, ' That was no man ;—that was God.' ”

“ These things I saw with my eyes, I heard with my ears, my hands clasped His, my head was laid upon His breast, and He loved to have it there, and the heart of that man was the heart of God. I saw, I heard, I touched, I handled, I know the very heart of God. He is all-pitiful, all-loving, all-pardoning, gentler than the gentlest mother, more patient than the kindest father. I saw, I heard, I touched, I handled, I know God, and now death has no dread for me, and the world's darkness is all irradiated with the light of that God and of His great heaven. My sorrows are soothed, and pains and perplexities have all vanished away, and my heart runs over with joy, as I live in the fellowship of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. Poor troubled, bent, and weary hearts of men, longing to know what the heart of God is, these things I speak to you that ye may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with God the

Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." And once again to any of you whose hearts are sore, or sad by reason of sin, or fear, or pain, or doubt, these things are spoken to you that your griefs and your pains may pass away, and that in Christ your joy may be full.

II.

THE INHERITANCE OF GOOD AND EVIL.

“I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me ; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments” (or, bringing out the real meaning better : “Showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me, and keep My commandments”).—EXOD. xx. 5, 6.

WE too often read the Bible as if it were a book telling about things in another world. We go to the Bible that we may discover what God is, but we miss the good of our Bible study often, because we do not take back into our every-day life the truths that we discover about God. I am persuaded that the best and the indispensable commentary to Scripture is our experience of every-day business and domestic life. The God we read about in the Bible is not a different God from the God that is reckoning with you and me from morning to evening, day after day, week after week, year after year, through our life. What the Bible says about God we have to verify and recognise in the God that is ruling our earthly existence.

Now, there is an experience that I am sure has come to all my hearers who have reached thirty or forty years of age. You have reversed the judgment of your youth about the goodness or the evil of many elements of your life. In your young pleasure-seeking, pleasure-loving years, many experiences that came to you, knit into the very structure of your life by the will and love of God, came to you with a forbidding voice. They seemed hard and harsh. Perhaps you did not reckon them unjust, but you disliked them ; you thought them stern and unlovely. Other elements of your life you welcomed, they brought you joy, they brought you ease, they brought you flattery and pleasure, you counted them all good ; but when a man has got on to a certain length in life, he goes back to those verdicts of his youth, and, like a higher Court of Appeal, he reverses a good many of them. There are things in the very texture of life that your young, joyous heart recoiled from that, now you have reached maturer years and increased responsibilities, you have discovered are the very grandeur and the dignity of your human existence. Take these out, and where would be all that is noble, elevated, and contenting to your own heart, in your character, in your condition ; and not a few of those things that you counted worthiest and best, you look at now and wonder if they were not rather temptations to evil. Had you not discovered how to control them, they would have warped, twisted, spoiled, and defaced the fairest things that God meant you to weave into your life so as to make it beautiful for eternity.

Well, now, I think a corresponding experience comes to all of us. We read our Bibles regularly, and study them sympathetically, and willingly give

time to pore over the sayings that are in them about God and about the human heart. There are some sayings in the Bible, that at first struck a chill into our spirit when we heard them, and after years have gone over our head and we have learned to know what is solid and what is superficial in life—what is of unspeakable value and what is a mere passing pleasure or comfort—we come back to those passages with pleasure ; they are just the parts of our Bible that we would not part with, because that would mean taking from us those things that we have found best in God's dealings with us. I venture to think that the text which I have chosen for your study to-night is a passage of that sort. I imagine there are people sitting in this church who do not like it. They will not go the length of unbelievers who say that it pictures to us an unjust, haughty, selfish, self-assertive God ; but still they do say in the secret of their own hearts that it shows God's character in a repellent aspect. They would, if it were put to them, alter it if they had the power. I fancy some of my hearers consider that these words should be changed. They would like a God less awful, less stern, less terrible. What does it say about God ? "God is a jealous God," sternly reckoning with those that take from Him the love that is His due and give it to other objects of worship ; following with His favour those that serve, worship, and love Him.

God visits sin with relentless retribution, aye, but more than that, God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him.

Is that a comforting thought about God that is given forth in that awful declaration of the second

commandment? I venture—with all diffidence in my interpretations of Scripture, but yet with a very great confidence in the truth of it—to assert that there is infinitely more of cheer and comfort and thankfulness for our hearts in that revelation of God's relation to sin, than in many of those passages of the Bible that we count fountains of salvation.

Well, now, I invite your indulgent attention as I try, in the very short time at my disposal on a night like this, to bring before your minds the points of a view that seems to me to clear our pathway of life, and clear the mist and darkness that lie over that aspect of God's government of our world as delineated in this declaration.

I do not ask you to take what I say to be the real meaning, or all true. It is merely the best I have been able to get on the subject. Take it and use it according to your own experience.

Well, now, the first thing that we have got to deal with is the declaration that God is a jealous God. I think a great many people shrink back a little from bringing into connection with God that fierce passion of the human heart that we know as "jealousy." Jealousy! that intense, watchful, claiming demand for fidelity in the most intimate ties of affection that bind together men and women, father and child, friend and friend. Is that all? Now, put out of your minds all thought of that which is described indefinitely by the same word, a poor, trivial, selfish, suspicious, little-minded jealousy that often goes by the name, that is not what is meant. What we have got to think of is that intense craving for just, righteous response to love; that absolute assertion of the claims and demands that love has to fidelity and obedience,

to receive its just response. Is that a thing undignified? Is that a thing base? Why! I tell you, in all its tremendous moral assertion, when it is wronged it is the truest kind of instinct God Himself has planted in our nature, and its roots are preserved in the very noblest elements of a human being. For what is this jealousy? Why, it is that noblest, purest passion of the human heart, the genuine, passionate, intense love of one turned to rage and indignation by the outrage and violation of what is most sacred, reverent, and Divine in our human existence. Mark you, before a man can experience the pain, the passion, and the resentment of righteous jealousy, he must have loved with an overwhelming, mastering, glorious, and grand love. The unlovingness of infidels and strangers, you care not for that; you miss only the love of one upon whom you have showered the adoration of your heart, and from whom you have a right to demand gratitude and answering affection. It is against the wrongs, the treachery of that loved one that your jealousy bursts forth. Would you have our God pictured as a God that is not jealous when we transfer to other and unworthy objects of worship the love, the trust, the adoration of our hearts that ought to go out to Him—the God that made us; the Father that holds us in His arms; the God that so loved our lost world that He gave His dearest, only begotten Son to die that we might live? Would you have it said that God is not jealous of our answering affection? Why, it would be another way of saying that God does not care for us—that it is nothing to God in heaven whether I love or try to please Him. It would be another way of saying that it is nothing to me if we are the children of a Father in heaven,

if I don't care for it to be true that God is a jealous God who cannot endure that we should transfer to another the love and trust that should be given to Him.

God is a jealous God. Now, let me follow my own maxim, let us come into our real every-day life and see what that means. What is the real meaning of God's jealous assertion of His right to our obedience, to our love, to our trust? Well, I will tell you what it is. It is this thing, that many a man sitting in this church has felt and trembled before in his own life. It is that strange, mysterious force that all through our existence causes retribution to dog the heels of sin, that brings vengeance sooner or later on every act of impiety and of disobedience to the good and holy will of God. Ah! it is this certainty that comes to men who are not over-religious, who are not orthodox believers in our Bible, that all through our world's course and progress there is running that sudden, intense burning of a power greater, grander than us, making for righteousness, pursuing sin relentlessly, re-acting against iniquity with an intense hatred of it that will root it out, and following with love, with favour, with support, with approbation, with reward, and with victory, all our battles for righteousness, goodness, truth, and love. That is what the commandment means when it says God is a jealous God. He is not merely lukewarm in his advocacy of goodness. He is not an absentee God. He has not gone away from our world. He does not leave you and me to fight out the battle of sin and iniquity single-handed, and all alone; He is ever standing on our side against evil. He is with us and leads us on. He does the things we cannot do. God is passionately against sin. God

is with His whole soul and being the living God making for righteousness.

So now we can see what it means when the commandment says, that "God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him, and shows mercy unto thousands of them that love Him." There is something in the personal aspect, too, of that declaration that many hearts are repelled by, precisely because they have fallen into that mistake of our preaching and our theology and our Scripture interpretation, of speaking of this God of the Bible, the God we worship in our churches, as if He were a Being quite distinct and separate from the God of Nature and the God of the moral government of our world. God, an abstract personality, a Being away up there in heaven, fiercely resenting want of love to Him, and passionately favouring those that love and believe in Him? Is that what it means? No. He is a living, real God. He is in your life and mine, and we have to meet Him in all the ties of duty that are round our lives, in all those possibilities of goodness, of spirituality, of purity, of virtue, of justice, of righteousness and holiness, which come to all. That God that meets you in your home, the God that shall judge you for the way in which you discharge your duties of affection to wife and child—that God that will reckon with you for the fashion that you keep your heart pure and unspotted—that God that will heap vengeance on you if you defile your soul by bowing down and worshipping the world's gods, and wealth and promotion, won by dishonourable actions—that living, real God that bids you speak out for Christ when He is wounded and slandered—that God

that bids you—by speaking out boldly your own faith—help the man whose faith is breaking—Oh! that God, not a pure abstract personality. That is a Being whose whole mind, heart, and will are goodness, justice, truth, and love! How do you meet that God when He comes to you in His goodness? Does your heart go out to that good God, or does it go out against Him? Is your life in the lines of God's emulation for goodness and righteousness, or is it against Him? Ah! mark you, God cannot but resent the conduct of those that hate Him in that real fashion. God does not go out of His way to impose punishment and retribution on sin. This world of ours—if the Bible is right—is a world beneath whose exterior there is moving, everywhere present and passionately in earnest, the great heart, mind, and will of God, craving for goodness, purity, justice, truth, and love. If your life be full of impurity, or injury and injustice to creatures God made, why you are bearing yourself against God, against the force of Omnipotence; either God must abandon His resolve to make righteousness triumph, or He must crush you. 'God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him, and showing mercy to the thousandth generation of them that love Him and keep His commandments.'

Now I come to the second portion of my subject, and perchance the more difficult. God is declared to visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Is that just? If it is just still is it not cruel? What! the innocent children, that had no voice when their father did the wicked deed, have to be punished

for the offences they never committed ! Who said they were to be punished ? “ Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.” Now, once again, if we want to interpret the Bible truly, we shall do it best by going to actual life and seeing what we find there, and I venture to declare (quite apart from faith, it is simple common sense and reason), there is no logical mind, that could describe what we see in actual government in the world, as punishment of children for their fathers’ offences. What we do see is this, that children suffer loss—social, physical, mental, moral, spiritual—because of the defects, the ignorance, and the negligence of their parents ; but he is a fool who talks of the children being punished. You cannot feel moral reprobation against a child because of the baseness or wickedness of the father. This thing at least is certain, no man would ever reasonably talk of the child being punished for the parents’ crime. Well, but perhaps you say that it is not meant as such. What we want justified and made reasonable is this seemingly cruel fact, that innocent, guileless children are injured, damaged, and put at a disadvantage in life because of the defects or offences of their parents. What have you to say to that ? Why, just this. You must set over against that the fact that children benefit gratuitously through the goodness of their parents, and through the intelligence of their parents, and through the industry of their parents. It is not merely an entail of evil that we have got to reckon with and interpret ; there is also an entail of goodness, of strength, of wisdom, of good disposition, of character, aye ! of grace itself. Now, what we have got before us is simply this great law of inheritance. In actual fact, children enter into the property of their

parents. By the laws of civilised countries they inherit whatever their fathers possess or have acquired through the toil and industry of those that went before them. By the laws of physical life children receive from their parents the health, the strength, aye, and also the diseases that their parents have contracted, or their ancestors before them. It is that great law by which the whole physical, mental, moral, spiritual, secular property of one generation is passed on to another. Well, now, what shall you say of that ordinance of God? No doubt it transmits evil from father to child, but it transmits good as well. Would you dare, in order to break off that entail of mischief, of evil, to snap asunder the fine machinery of heredity? Why, to get rid of the entail of evil you would do away with the entail of good. I will tell you what it would be like. It would be exactly as if you were, at the end of one generation, to take all the cultivation of the soil, irrigation works, the buildings, all the manufactures, the tools and implements, all the acquisition of invention, all the accumulations of commerce, all the arts, the science, the literature, and the knowledge that have been piled together and won from the realm of ignorance and obscurity in our world, and destroy it all at one sweep and compel the next generation to begin afresh. Why! if you did that human progress would be impossible. The toil and industry of mankind would be like that story of Sisyphus, doomed to roll incessantly a huge stone up a mountain, which when it got to the top, rolled down to the foot again. There would be no history of mankind at all, worse still, there would be no solidarity in humanity; you would reduce human beings to a semi-chaos of atoms having no connexion

with one another at all ; each selfish and self-centred without any grandeur, without any roots in the past, without any part in the future. Why ! look you, it would affect each man individually. Take from him that ordinance of God that binds him into intimate and close connection with the past, and that orders out of him by forces and influences a future contribution to the story to pass on to the future, and what would you do ? Why, you would reduce the dignity and worth of his life to inanity ; you would make him a petty, insignificant atom. His every action would have lost all its grandeur and dignity, and would drop, like a grain of sand, into the sea of time and be lost. By the law of heredity every action I do, every element of character that I form within me, is a living seed, planted in the soil of human story, growing on indefinitely from age to age. Oh ! think what a tremendous moral momentum it gives to human conduct and character when a man realises that what he has within him of mental, physical, and moral capacity is a bequest that he has got from the past, comes to him through the toil and the achievements of the bygone generations, is not his own to use for his selfish ends, but is a solemn trust given him by God. It must be by him handed on to the future, impaired and diminished in value, or ennobled, enlarged, and made wealthier. Why, here is a thing that you see everywhere through life ; men and women once careless about religion, loose as regards morality perchance, with nothing of lofty effort and inspiration in their life. To them God has given the solemn charge of little children that have wound about them the very life fibres and cords of sweetest, tenderest affection. I have seen how, many a time,

life has acquired a new solemnity to a real father's heart—how a man began to wish that religion was more real to him. He saw what he might do for his boy if in his father's home the lad felt God to be real and God's service and love to be the grandest and sweetest things in life. Ah! cut those ties of affection, make it impossible for father or mother to give that inheritance to their children, and see how you would impoverish our human life. More than that I tell you, you would knock away the greatest buttress of our hope of immortality. If each man is let into this world a separate, isolated atom, without connection with the past, no growth onward in the future, then what likelihood is there that he should have a place in God for ever? But if this thought be true—nay, it is true; science apart from religion declares it the greatest truth that wisdom has discovered—if I recognise that in all the attire of bodily, mental, moral, spiritual privileges, prerogatives, facilities, and capacities, with which God has gifted me, I have entered into a wealth which has been slowly wrought out in the fierce factory of human toil, sweat, thought, and struggle through long centuries and ages; if in this I recognise in myself the workmanship of God's own hands, that it is God that has been working out the story of humanity and evolving His purposes, His plans; then in me there are activities, desires, decrees of God's own heart and will, and on from me they pass, linked and knit into the further unrolling web of God's purpose in human story—then I see how I am fixed fast in my place a part of that great work of art divine. God does not sow that when the harvest is ripe He should leave it to rot and die. If humanity be this grand continuous web of Divine

making, then we may be quite certain that at last God with His own hands will gather the ripe, golden harvest of all our toil, and His love and care.

Now, one thing more ; still I think a thought of pain may linger in men's hearts. You say that that pictures God creating this mysterious organism of inheritance, and then launching into it good and evil with impartial hands, blowing both along their course with careless breath, leaving men and women to fight out the battle between them. Now, that is not true. Good and evil do not travel down the stream of humanity with equal progress. Goodness is obedience to God. Goodness has on its side all the laws of Nature, all the laws of morality, all the laws and energies and forces of life. Goodness means health, strength, and progress. Goodness tends to life and to purity. Sin is the violation of God's laws. Sin comes into antagonism with the energies that weave together our existence. Sin means injury, damage, detriment, the poisoning of the vital forces. Sin holds within itself the elements and germs of decay. Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Goodness tends to purity and to life. Sin tends to decay, to destruction, and to extinction. Iniquity persistently maintained through one, two, three generations in a race means their extinction by disease and the judgment of God. Goodness, virtue, morality, purity, mean health, strength, progress—physical, mental, moral—constant advancement towards life and perpetuity. God is against sin. God is on the side of goodness. The entail of evil is short. The entail of goodness is long. That we learn through life.

Now turn to the Bible. Is that taught in this declaration of the second commandment ? It surely

is. "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." Does God tire? No. By the third or fourth generation the work is finished; either repentance has amended the race or ruin has extinguished it. But in the relations of God to those that love Him, there can be neither break in its continuity nor end to His mercy. "Showing mercy unto the *thousandth* generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments;" that means onward to all eternity, in untiring energy of blessing.

My brother, when your heart faints and fails as you look at the over-mastering tyranny of sin, at the weakness of goodness in its battles for righteousness, go to the second commandment and read there how God is against sin and rapidly extinguishes it. God is on the side of goodness endlessly with His love and mercy for ever and ever.

III.

THE CRIME AND THE CURSE OF CAIN.

GENESIS IV.

OUR subject to-night is the narrative told in the Fourth Chapter of Genesis. The story has been already read, but it is necessary that I should make the meaning clearer to you in one or two places.

First of all, the speech of God addressed to Cain is very badly rendered in our English Bible, and it is not easy to bring out the meaning without paraphrasing. This is what is actually said, "And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? What is that burning within thy breast? and why do you go with your eyes fixed on the ground? (the attitude of a sullen man brooding over revenge.) Why do you go with your head hanging down? If thou doest well—if your plannings are good and right, would not you go with head erect like a happy, cheerful, innocent man? and if thou are meaning evil, then sin, like a wild beast, lieth couching at the door of thy heart, and on thee is his desire to spring upon thee, and make thee his prey; but thou must master it, thou oughtest to overcome it."

Now the next point I want you to note is this: In verse 17, we are told that Cain and his descendants

first commenced to erect fortified cities—cities with walls round them, that is the meaning of “he builded a city.” Then we find that his descendants invented various arts—the art of music, and also various industries—the making of brass and iron tools and weapons.

Now comes another passage where the meaning is not at all brought out in our Bible. In possession of those brass and iron weapons of offence and defence, a spirit of exultation takes hold of Cain’s descendants. “Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice ; ye wives of Lamech, hearken to my speech : for I will kill a man for a wound, a young warrior for a (mere) scratch. If Cain was to be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech shall be avenged seventy and sevenfold.” It is the spirit that came with those new implements of defence : for a mere touch, a mere scratch there is vowed vengeance to death. Then in the last two verses, I would simply say that the meaning of what is said in such brief fashion, is, that in another line of descendants from Adam the true and real religion of obedience to the good God was maintained, and extended, and spread.

The purpose of the author of that story is unquestionably a religious one. The number of things that won’t fit together, the amount of difficulties that cannot be explained in it, proves that the writer had no intention to give a complete and exact account of historical events. The same thing is true of all those early chapters in Genesis. If you will read them right through, and allow your mind to take in the real impression that they are fitted to leave upon it, you will not doubt for a moment that the purpose of

their construction is to declare great truths about God, and the human heart.

The history that is recorded in them is a history of the spiritual course and career of mankind. In the first chapter you get the conception unique in human literature and religion of the grand majestic God, maker of all those things that pagan people bow down to worship, fitting up this world to be a home for man—His child made in His own image—taking his true place as lord and master of all nature's forces. Not kneeling to them as his gods, but counting them his ministers, his servants, to work out his destiny on earth.

Then in the second chapter we have man put into true relations of sex, true attitude towards nature, true attitude towards God, towards temptation, towards spiritual achievement.

Then in the third chapter the record of how man, choosing to follow the lower voice of physical nature rather than the higher voice that came from God, sins and falls, and brings evil and misery on himself: how, through that misery and sin, the heart that made him clings to him still, and bids him rise against his tempter, and enter on a long battle against sin and evil, with the certainty that ultimately he would conquer.

And so, at the end of that chapter, we have the human race launched out on that long campaign, and this fourth chapter takes up the story there, and tells us how those two lines of human sin, and of grace Divine, go on and extend and work themselves out on the stage of human history.

Well, now, the first thing that strikes one in that story is this, that the second sin committed on earth

is at once full-developed, black-hearted murder—murder done by a brother on a brother. Does this seem too great a leap into evil? Only to our sophisticated judgments does it seem so. In essence all sin is one—spiritual and physical—gross and fine. For example, the brutality of the ignorant workman that strikes down and murders the woman he swore to love, we put in one category; but the fine torture inflicted by your educated gentleman who breaks his wife's heart as certainly, as if he had struck her with a dagger, is perhaps blacker in the eyes of God. He is as much a murderer as the other.

Disobedience to God, distrust of the Father that made us, the destruction of that sweet tie of man to God is the first sin; and the next—what should it be but the fruit of that? utter destruction of human brotherhood, trust, and love—a fratricide!

The next thing that is surprising in the construction of this story is, that the motive assigned for the first murder is religion. Cain's sacrifice rejected, Abel's accepted, and rage fills the man whose religion comes out worst in the competition, and he murders his brother. Now would you have thought of that? Religion, a religious motive, as the origin of the first bloodshed on earth! It looks unnatural till you come to read the history of the wars that have devastated the face of our earth; and you find that the vast majority of them sprang out of religious antipathies till you go and look at the cold-hearted, merciless, hatred between Orangemen and Catholics at the present day. Religion! I will tell you why it is that we are surprised to find it is the fierce impulse that drives a bad man to murder; it is because such a number of literary people now-a-days are

telling us that the enlightened world has ceased to trouble much about religion; men look after substantial things, like social position, pleasures, indulgences, tangible things, and it is only a few fanatics that are much excited or troubled about religion. What folly! People do not generally talk much about the things that move them most. Now, do you know that the largest number of cases of insanity in our asylums are forms of what? Lust? No; that comes second. Money, property, gain? No; but religious mania. What does that mean? It means that questions about the other world, troubled thoughts about God, deep-stirring emotions about religion, still, as it has been since the beginning, make one of the biggest factors at least, if not the mightiest, in the inmost recesses of the human heart.

Cain's offering was rejected, Abel's was accepted—wherefore? You will find in some commentaries an answer given—because Abel brought flesh, an animal sacrifice, and Cain brought fruit, a vegetable sacrifice, and God prefers a sacrifice with bloodshed. Nonsense! Or again you will find this answer—because God is sovereign Lord, and chooses of His own arbitrary will, without ground or reason, to love one and hate another, and accept one and reject another. Then God would be utterly unworthy of our worship. The father who treated his children like that would deserve to be put in a gaol or an asylum. No; rationality, justice, reason are supreme in God, not caprice, not partiality, or irrationality. If commentators had only read their Bible a little more, and taken its teaching in all its simplicity, and had sought in the Epistle to the Hebrews for an explanation, there they would have got it.!

“ By faith ” Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice, and for want of faith Cain did not. And what was that want of faith? In that Cain chose to give fruit instead of an animal? Not a bit of it. Faith is not a superficial thing. Its presence is not to be looked for in physical presentations or actions; it is a thing of the heart. Abel’s heart was God’s; Cain’s heart was not. The one sacrifice was genuine; the other was a sham. God won’t be befooled, that is what it means.

Cain was an irreligious man. That is strange! an irreligious man!! Why then was he so excited by the rejection of his sacrifice? If he had no love of God; no trust in Him, no heart of devotion in Him, why did not he just turn away and think no more about it?

Do not mistake. When you see a man angry because his creed is contradicted; when you hear theologians denouncing a brother because he differs from them in their teaching; when you hear preachers and standard-bearers of one sect condemning and cursing another sect, do not set it down to sweet, gentle religion. Do you think that real religion could ever hate, slander, rage against a brother? All anger, all hatred, all antipathy, all denunciation, all bitter antagonism come from the devil, and men indulge in them, not because God or truth are struck at, but because their own pride is injured. Cain was mad with rage because his brother was preferred to him. Ah! discount that out of all the religious discussions in the past, and the religious controversies in the present; avoid the side that betrays most hate, and violence, and anger. The Spirit of God is gentleness, meekness, purity, truth. One can defend the truth

with warmth against the men that are denying it—defend it too if you wish with strong pieces of satire, and logic, but never, never with hatred, even to a heretic.

A warning came from God between the temptation and the deed. The voice of God bade Cain mark that something was all wrong within him ; that he was on the very verge of a deadly danger. You and I read the story, and say it was a supernatural warning. You and I say such help does not come to us in our temptations. If God would come and speak to us as directly as He spoke to Cain, then we should not have done many a deed that we wish undone now.

It is a pity that the supernatural part of the Bible is so misused. If we would only look at it with simplicity, without misconception and pre-conception, we should discover that there is a great deal of the natural in the supernatural, and then we should also realise that there is a great deal of the supernatural in the natural. Look at that Divine warning ! It is nothing more than the universal, divinely implanted, physical warning that comes to every man tempted to murder ; or beset by any strong forbidden passion, out of the very structure of his own body ; nothing more than that physical warning made articulate. Every child in this church can identify the thing. "Cain, Cain, beware of that fierce fire within your heart ; is that a thing to dally with ?" Every little child that has hated a brother has felt that fire ; and felt that there was something unnatural, something evil about it. The sullen brooding spirit of vengeance, what does it do ? It painfully contracts the muscles of a man's neck. It takes the

elasticity, the buoyancy out of him. You know that brooding look when you nursed wrath against a friend, and were planning how you might do him an injury. Did you not feel a sense of discomfort in yourself?

If you would do well, would you feel like that? Think of it, you that have dallied with a fierce temptation, a passionate appetite that was urging you to yield yourself to it, and to plunge into the wild fascination, the intoxication of a forbidden longing. What did it feel like? Like a fierce ungovernable force—like standing on the brink of a rushing river, or on the verge of a cataract? Back, back, lest you yield to it; then you are no longer your own master. A momentary wild whirl of intoxication, and then destruction. Sin lieth at the door like a wild beast with the fascination of ungovernable force, crouching for a fatal spring.

After the deed was done, the voice of God comes again to the murderer, "Cain, where is thy brother Abel?" God asking where Abel was. As if he did not know that he was lying dead out in the field.

Now your learned rationalists who mistake for intelligence that utter blindness and deafness to poetry, and music, and exquisite picturing and suggestion say, "Look at the childishness of that story! What gross conception the man had of God coming and asking Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? What does it mean?" I will tell you what it means. If God had come and said "Thou hast murdered thy brother," that would have been hard on the criminal. "Where is Abel thy brother?" It was meant to give the poor sinner a chance to improve his position, to

voluntarily make a clean breast of it, to repent before he was crushed with conviction.

Is there not a thing that you have felt in your own life, and that you can see all around you, a delaying on God's part to bring a man face to face with conviction? Conscience does not strike at once. Evil habits may be pursued without penalty coming on you for a long while. Not altogether alone though are you left. Sometimes questions come to you: Is it well, this? Are you wise? Will not an evil day come? What are you doing? Remember the days before you did it. Ah! did you misuse God's mercy? Did you mistake that forbearance of God that was meant to lead you to repentance, and say, "God does not know; there is no reckoning with sin." A man may go on his own way, and hold to his course unchecked for a time; but, ah! how we misunderstand the goodness of God; the delay is given to give us the best chance to make the best of what we spoil by our wrong doing.

There is an almost laughable stupidity about sin that the Bible is very fond of holding up to ridicule. Sin is selfishness, the exaggeration of a man's single individual interests and claims. A man takes what is not his, wrongs and injures others, neglects his duties, indulges himself out of an over-love of his own little person. Now he cannot do that without perverting his own judgment. His eyes are buried in himself, he loses the consciousness of things as other people see them—that is why criminals constantly make such absurd blunders that lead to their conviction. "Where is Abel thy brother?" God says to Cain, and Cain means to brazen it out—to deny the deed—to escape discovery by defiance. "I know not,

am I my brother's keeper?" How could he better have said that he had ceased to be brotherly? Is that the answer a loving brother would have given to such a question? "Where is Abel thy brother?" "Am I my brother's keeper?" If he had wanted to say, "I have lost all love of him, I hate him, he is no brother of mine," how could he better say it than by, "Am I my brother's keeper?" And yet how much echoing and re-echoing of that murderer's speech (for it is the very motto and figure-head of all murder) is there in the actual life of our own times, and in the mistaken maxims that rule our social relations. What lies behind the fierce, merciless competition and struggle of our day? I do not see well how we are to help it, but we have got to understand the danger of it. Is not it "every man for himself?" and that is the beginning that goes on into this—"Am I my brother's keeper?" Oh! do not let us be proud of our nineteenth-century civilisation. I do think it is far ahead of former generations; but let us forget what is behind because of the long, long way we have got to go forward yet. How can you expect but to have misery, and hatred, and selfishness, and hard-heartedness, grudging, and envy, and murder, greed, theft, and revolt, in those that are downtrodden, the unfortunate, and disherited? How can it but be? You have no cause of wonder that men look at the wretched state of human society, and say, "How could the good God have made a world like that? Look at the horrible friction, the jarring, the grinding of the wheels." This machinery God erected does not go well; but is it being worked as God meant it to be worked? Come with me to the great factory where splendid machinery is erected—listen to it clanging,

jarring, grinding, sticking, and turn to the architect of it and tell him his work is a blunder, and he comes and says, "But I meant it to go with a great deal of oil, put in it to ease the friction." You are not giving the maker fair play. God made our social order that knits us all together, but He meant a great deal of oil of human kindness to be put in. God meant our society to work on the understanding that every man should love his neighbour as much as he loves himself. Now, I won't add one other word to that, but can we be proud of our great civilisation yet?

Punishment was inflicted on the fratricide that was no more than the natural, inevitable result of his misdeed; and I have very grave doubt—though I have not knowledge enough to be able to deny it—about what we sometimes hear men say about God, that He arbitrarily attaches penalties to sins and transgressions. I do not think that one bit of hell will have been added arbitrarily by God. There won't be one single pang there that is not just the natural harvest of sinning. That was so with Cain's punishment, "Henceforth thou art accursed off the face of the earth; an alien, banished from its sweetness, and beauty, and restfulness, and innocent enjoyment." Cannot you understand it? . . . Never again could he lie down with a happy light heart as when he was a little child. . . . A man who has tasted poison cups of exaggerated, forbidden pleasure, he destroys his own palate—henceforth the simple, innocent enjoyments that make childhood so bright and happy and pure, manhood and womanhood sweet, are insipid to him, as milk or fresh water are to the drunkard. If you read (though I would hardly bid you do it) some of the books that pour out the remorse and the shame

and the rage of great sinners in their old age, one of the most awful things is that note forever recurring of bitter, bitter rage because when they would give all they have to go back to the joys of purity, of innocence, of goodness, they have lost the capacity to accomplish it, or to be even conscious of them.

Now let us turn to the other part of it: "A vagabond, a fugitive shalt thou be on the earth." What means that? Just literally that he would be always travelling about? Never. It means that never again on this earth would he know a home. Home, sweet, sweet home! so much better for all of us than anything worldly we can think of or remember to keep our hearts tender. Within there are no enemies; all are bound together, all working for one common interest, all stand by one another. A man lays aside his weapons and his armour when he comes into his own home, and ceases to watch suspiciously to protect himself from foes. That is what makes home so good, but Cain murdered his own brother, so henceforth he never can trust brother, wife, child. He treacherously slew his own brother, and never anywhere on God's earth with another human being beside him can his heart feel at ease. When he slew his brother Cain killed the possibility of home for ever. A wanderer, restless, suspicious, a fugitive should he be, and homeless in all God's earth.

Now I must simply sketch how that truth is worked out in the rest of the chapter. The descendants of Cain are pictured to us as having hit upon an idea for self-protection, to surround their homes with great walls and ramparts. Is that a great gain? Does it look so? We make the blunder of being wonderfully proud of our splendid armaments, and our navy, and

our cannon, and do not think how heavy a price we have to pay for them, and what a poor thing it is that we cannot live in this world without spending endless money and lives to prevent our throats being cut. The bolts on your door, is that a thing to be very proud of? Oh! think how much more peacefully you would sleep if you knew no man would injure or wrong you in the night! Do you see it? The restlessness, the suspicion, the awful loss come from the destruction of human brotherhood, and these poor souls are driven to escape from the doom that is come upon them. How? By going further and further on that way which needs weapons of defence and more powerful means of protection for their homes. . . . There is no peace to be got except by going back to what God meant life and brotherhood to be. It is the inner restlessness of heart, the inability any longer to have their soul refreshed by simple, sweet nature that drives the descendants of Cain to discovery, to invention, attempts to find something that will fill up that void; and so I pass over to the other side. The interest of the chapter lies in the development of sin, and just one little bright touch like the silver lining of a black cloud that comes in the last two verses. The descendants of Seth are taught wisdom and seek another way. His children come and life develops, and they too are conscious of its emptiness, its dissatisfaction, its hopelessness; and it dawns on them more and more that the only way to once again reach the sweet paradise that was once his is by getting nearer and nearer to God, and God's ways of human living, and God's thoughts for human hearts; and so we read while sin works itself out with its terrible lessons of defeat and disappoint-

ment, by the grace and love of God in another line of humanity, more and more the sweet promise is taken and turned into reality, and men abjure sin and choose God and goodness, and go on in that long battle waiting for the coming of Christ, who should win completely the victories they have only won partially, and make earth once again God's Eden.

IV.

THE FIELD OF THE SLUGGARD.

I SHALL take my text from Proverbs xxiv. 30-34, and I shall read it to you in a new translation : " By the field of the sluggard I was passing, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. It was all grown over with briars, the face of it was covered with nettles, and the stone fence was in gaps ; and I gazed and pondered deeply [literally, I fixed my heart on it ; I studied it to take warning]. A snatch of sleep, a snatch of slumber, a snatch of folding the hands to repose, and striding comes thy ruin and thy poverty like a weaponed warrior." The passage is an exquisite picture. The moral of it might have been set boldly in unimaginative prose. The writer has taken pains to make the sluggard's vineyard and the man who saw it stand out before you in graphic, minute detail. The least we can do is to use our fancy a little, and try to see what the inspired writer wanted us to see. The task is a very homely and practical one, and you will forgive me if I do what is right, and preach a very homely and practical sermon to you on such a text. A traveller was making his way through a vine-growing country ;

the road was skirted on either hand by vineyards that found their way up the sloping ground and hung upon the cliffs; on either hand the vines were arranged like a row of soldiers at regular intervals, trained to short poles. Between each couple of vine ranks there ran little channels of irrigation, so that every day just the proper supply of water from the upper reservoir could be allowed to find its way to the roots of each particular plant and quench its thirst. These ribands of ground between the serried ranks of the vine plants were absolutely clean of every weed, every alien noxious growth that might pilfer the smallest quantity of moisture from the land and the sweet juices of the earth, and so deprive the vine clusters of their complete fulness and richness and flavour. The traveller saw it all with delight; he formed a high estimate of the prosperity of the district, and he took away with him a very excellent idea of the thrift and industry and the elevated moral character of the people. But presently a particular vineyard caught his eye, arrested his attention, and brought him to a stop. He was no idler lounging along; probably he was a commercial traveller, hurrying with quick, active footsteps; but those eyes caught sight of something that he could not pass without looking closer at it. There was one vineyard set out amidst that lovely, clean garden of growth, productiveness, and industry, like a thicket, where great pushing briars have forced their way up above the vines, and were overshadowing them, and robbing them of the sunlight, and tearing them down from their props on to the ground. There was a perfect crop of nettles and weeds, almost as if they had been sown there with a view to a weed harvest

while the dry stone wall erected round the vineyard here and there and all about had been allowed to tumble and topple down, the stones lying on the ground below, with a big gap left, through which all sorts of creatures might make their way and find their homes amongst the vines tangled with briars and weeds. Our traveller—I can see him—came to a halt, and then he walked right up to the wall of that vineyard, and he put one foot upon a big stone that had tumbled out of the wall, and he got his elbow and his knee and then his hand on, and there he remained looking. If you had been passing by, the first thing that you would have felt as you watched him was that that man had got eyes. There was something peculiar about his shrewd, keen face. Those eyes of his were wide awake ; they were open ; they were piercing and penetrating. You felt that they were going right through all that tangled weed-growing vineyard and seeing things that perhaps you did not see. Those eyes of his had such power that you felt that they would look you through and through. He was not the sort of man on whom you could try and palm off a lot of forged documents ; not the sort of man you would like to have with his eyes on you when you were doing something shabby or mean. The man had got eyes ; he looked, he gazed ; he fixed his attention on what came under his observation. But there was more than that about him. You could see from the working of his face, the wonder, the intent questioning, the smile of half contempt, and then the reverie of thought that has forgotten external things and is away among ideas and principles—you could see that the man thought, that he had a mind, and used it, that he was not

content merely to observe and record facts and appearances, but that he had in him the faculty of putting two and two together and seeing that they really made four. He analysed things, he dissected them and grouped them together; he saw a clue, and he followed that clue up, actively; he wanted to get underneath the phenomena, he wanted to know the causes, he would reach to the very root of a thing, and understand it through and through. "I fixed my"—not his mere intellect—"I fixed my heart upon it; I looked at it, gazed at it, and considered it, through and through, with a practical purpose, to learn a lesson."

Now, I am going right away to ask you to see what the man saw. Our shrewd traveller, with those keen eyes of his, and that active mind within him, rests there, gazing at that spectacle of waste, and ruin, and decay. He saw the broken-down wall, he saw the choked vines, he saw the parched, dried-up ground for want of regular irrigation, he saw all that material spectacle of waste and loss. But before he had looked long at it he saw something not with the eyes in his face. I have said it is not everybody that has even eyes in his head, but they are not much good unless you have eyes in your mind and soul and heart also. Well, before very long those inner eyes of his had seen a very great and wonderful truth. He saw that all that physical ruin and loss and mischief sprang out of moral causes. He did not say to himself, as many learned and scientific men would say: "Look and see those weeds and briars—that is Nature, Nature will always be putting out its forces and its energies, and wherever there is space weeds are sure to get root, and they will grow

and so on all round. There is gravitation, and if stones are not kept right in their place they tumble down." That is all very useful to know, but I will tell you what is more useful—that when Nature does you wrong and injury, when Nature strikes you over your fingers, it is because you have been bad morally.

I am talking to my own point ; I am not laying down a universal general law that applies everywhere. I am dealing with one great law—that suffering in our physical and external life springs from something wrong in our moral character. I am not pronouncing anything on political questions—far be it from me !—but these illustrations are in your daily papers, which, unfortunately, are the bulk of the reading for most of us ; not altogether unfortunately either, if we use our eyes and consider first, and think what is behind. It is something like this. Supposing you have a whole population all awake, with plenty of intelligence about them, plenty of humour and humanity, producing such a population as a country should be glad to have to be its defenders and its citizens, yet as you travel through it you see that the best is not made of the land ; it is suffering from want of more attention and pains given to it, and you see wretched dwellings and all the rest of it. Quite possibly you might go and look at it and consider it well ; you might say to yourself : "Why are these people so behind-hand ? Why do not they exert themselves ? Why do not they do better ?" Then you might discover that the soil is not so good, or that the land is in very small lots, and the people have not co-operation among them, and, therefore, could not get the machinery and the profits to make their land

produce better. You go further back than that, and say : " How have they got into that state ? " Perhaps you discover a system of land tenure, or land legislation that is not quite just, that would prevent them from getting the full value of their industry, and it takes the heart out of the people ; you might come back a red-hot law reformer. But it was precisely that sort of thing that our traveller did, only he did it in quite a different line, as to which I will go beyond my business just a trifle and say that we must not forget that after all the loss cannot entirely lie outside ourselves. He saw a lesson which possibly applies in remote parts of our country. This is what our traveller saw : he saw that the vineyard had gone to rack and ruin because its master was not man enough ; he was a sluggard, also an indolent fellow. He had got good muscles and good sinews, and he had intelligence, too, and he could have made that vineyard a rich property if he had worked hard enough. He did work, but many an hour of the day when he should have been in his vineyard he was dozing in his arm-chair, lying in his bed, not up in the morning. Unfortunately, you see, he was his own master. All of us could get up when we were clerks and had to be in our office at a certain time. It is a bad thing for a man to be too much his own master. Our traveller saw that this man had been idling, indulging himself, petting and warming his hands before the fire when it was cold, instead of, like his neighbours, getting the weeds out and stopping every little pilfering nettle that was trying to spring up, and with its noxious roots steal away the juices from the vines. That is what had done it. That ruined vineyard had the roots of its ruin in that man's character. It was not

adverse Nature, it was not the hostility of weeds, it was not the foxes that came and climbed up the wall and knocked the stones down ; it was the man himself, and the fault was that he was not half a man. I pass by the estate of the sluggard, "the vineyard of the man void of understanding." I cannot get the exact English word that is expressive enough to translate with. It means the man who has not the full quantity of manhood in him ; but there is more than that in it. This man not merely saw the cause, but he saw the very process by which it had come about ; and, do you know, I think that is the deepest, profoundest lesson ? He saw how easy it was for that vineyard to go to ruin and its master come to poverty. He saw that the man never meant to be evicted from the estate by the moneylender of whom he had borrowed to try and make up the arrears that should never have been there. He never intended that things should go so far—not a bit of it ; he did not abandon work and become a lounging idler and scoundrel right away—not a bit of it. He started as a very respectable man and a fairly industrious man. It was just this : that he began to be too fond of ease, indulgence, and bodily comfort ; he began to lose the pluck and spirit and enterprise that make a man take his pleasure out of his work, doing it successfully. Pulling out these weeds got to be a thing that made his back ache. He did not feel when he was doing it that he was making money, and keeping up that bright home, and making a future for his wife and children. Young man, if you have not got eyes to see what lies in your drudgery and toil you will not come to much in this world. One morning he woke up in bed and turned on his side and said : "I will

snatch a little more slumber ; it does not matter, I can work all the harder when I get up—it will be all right when I get up at eight o'clock.” Then there was the mid-day siesta, which is taken in the East, and he had probably eaten too well, and the sleep did not invigorate him, but simply made him dull the whole day ; and so there had to be another snatch of slumber, half an hour beyond what his neighbours had. Then he got tired of work, and went away home before supper, to be so comfortable before the fire and have a little repose. I do not suppose he did that all in one day, or that he did it every day of the week. If I could make you all know Hebrew you would better understand it. I tried to explain it to you in English—a snatch, a little bit of sleep, here and there—it was only little bits of failure. Here was the consequence. It would have taken his whole work to keep that vineyard clear of weeds, and keep that wall up, and keep those thorns and briars down ; but by missing those hours he got just a little behind ; a little bit was not quite up to the mark, and another little bit was not quite up to the mark. But nothing great, nothing appalling could appear all at once ; there was not a perfect forest of briars, a harvest, a whole crop of weeds and nettles. The first year he was simply one cask of wine short of what he might have been ; the next year perhaps he was one and a half, and so on ; it went on by such little bits. You see that if mischief came all at once, suddenly, then man would be warned ; and retribution following little petty defects and faults does not wake a man up to them. But I will tell you what does come suddenly, and the Hebrew brings it out as we cannot get at it in English. When a man takes a snatch of sleep and

slumber, a snatch of folding the hands in repose, and, suddenly looking up sees the cloud of doom come striding upon him when he is not expecting it, and he is distraised upon and driven out of his property to a distance—that is only half of the process that this man read for his own instruction. Here is the other half of it. You see the progress of damage was very slow—a little bit of foul ground, a little bit of diminution of juice and sap in the vines, a little bit of loosening about the walls ; but here is the mischief : each little bit added to that was gradually running up a wholesale bulk of arrears. Nevertheless, I think the man might have taken warning. But, do you know, there was a process of dilapidation going on in his character. That is the mischief. You cannot scamp your outside work without ruining your own character. This was what was happening as he indulged in indolence, as he permitted that weed of love and ease, as he suffered that noxious nettle of dislike of hard work, to spring here and there—this hour, that half hour, and so on. You see it was little bit by little bit. He did not feel a sudden degradation take place in his disposition, in his nature ; he did not feel his will suddenly become pulp, and have no more backbone in it, but gradually all the fibre was being taken out of him : he was suffering deterioration parallel with the deterioration of his vineyard. If that had only come right up to the man that used to be industrious, the very eyes of him would have risen in rebellion against it ; but as his vineyard gradually became less and less fruitful his eyes became used to it. He had less pride in him. He said sometimes : “It is not quite an agreeable vineyard, and it is not quite an agreeable life ; but,

oh! it is an easy, comfortable one." He could not have said that at the beginning—he was too much of a man; but the man in him was rotting out as his vineyard ran to ruin. And then it came to pass that once or twice, when neighbours remonstrated with him, all the old manhood in him woke up, and he went to his vineyard and looked at it. The first thing he said, was, "Ah! it is too far gone now"; and the second thing he felt within him, was, "If I were the man I was five years ago I should set to and do it all." But he just was not the man. That is precisely what comes—moral deterioration. When everybody else knew that the mortgage would be foreclosed, he was the one man who thought that something was going to turn up, and that he could tide it over a little longer, and he was the most astonished person in all the neighbourhood when he was turned out into the road.

Time does not permit me to apply all this in detail. But you do not need me to do so if I have succeeded at all in making you feel a moral of a great spiritual warning. I am going to take you back to that traveller of ours. I positively like that man. He is a sensible man; the sort of man you would like to live with, and have to do with. He was in terrible danger as he stood there, with his foot on that fallen stone, looking at that sluggard's garden; he was in moral danger. I will tell you why. Because he was looking at his neighbour's faults. A very perilous thing that. What use do you make of your keen perception of your neighbour's faults? I will tell you what many a usurer does. He takes advantage of the young man's folly and ignorance of the world and of his lust to get him into his clutches. And

many another man sees his neighbour's weakness, and takes advantage of it to undo him in his business. I will tell you another thing that the natural man in us does. When we see our neighbour's faults we gloat over them, and take an unholy joy in them, like the son of Noah who gloated over his father's shame. God forgive us when the sight of our neighbour's faults, weaknesses, and sins, does not pain us! Oh, if we had the goodness of Christ, what a superior world we should live in! Do you know what is the right use to make of your neighbour's faults? I will tell you. There is nothing harder for you than to see your own faults. I do not blame you if you have never succeeded. It is impossible for a man really to thoroughly see his own faults in himself. The curious thing is that even the most stupid man has a most astounding, clear, and keen perception of his neighbour's faults. Do you know why a beneficent God made it so? To make up for the difficulty of seeing them in yourself. The right use of that wonderful instrument you have of laying bare your neighbour's faults is that you may look at them and consider them well, and take warning. Every time you see another man's baseness and meanness, go away home and sit down and, say: "Oh, God, if I had got such—such things in me!" I said to you that perhaps that man was a commercial traveller. If he was, he went and looked at his books, and said: "Have I been as I should be? Have I been wide awake, studying the man I wanted to get an order from? Have I done my duty to my employer as I should do it?" Perhaps he was a husband and a father. What has the vineyard to do with the house, home, and family? A great deal. He went away, and as he

went away, he said: "Do I take as much pains to make my home bright and happy for my children as I try to make my office attractive for the man who is going to do business with me?" Perhaps he was a church member—no, I must be honest—perhaps he was a minister. I wonder if I ever say to myself: "My wife and servants think I spend four fore-noons a week trying to get the best and richest food for them on Sunday because they know I am shut up in my study, and I told them not to come with business. But I wonder how often I am sitting by the fire, with a newspaper in my hand, doing nothing with my sermon; and when I am at my desk I wonder if I am all awake, if the steam is up and the machinery is working. And when I am in my pulpit is my heart in it, my conscience in it, my will in it, my mind in it, my prayer in it?"

Now you will not be angry if I come to you. If that man had been a band of deacons of a congregation, or if he had been a council of the church, I wonder what is the lesson he would have taken? Would he have said to himself: "We have God's vineyard to keep; how many of our members are asleep? How many of them are keeping their money to themselves unduly? How many of them come to the church selfishly, to get helped on to heaven, and care nothing to help a servant girl from the country to find friends in a church when she has strayed into it? How many of them are trying to make peace when quarrels spring up?" Oh! and suppose the church looked outside and said to itself: "The vineyard God gave us is the world which we have to win and to reclaim from the wilderness; have we done it? If we have not done it, it is because of selfishness,

indolence, and half-heartedness." Oh, how often we have thought that all we had to do in the church was to pluck the grapes, and make wine and drink it, instead of being God's vineyard labourers! How often, too, we have wasted all our heart and thought fighting about the theory of wine-making, or the vegetable physiology of the vine, while the vines have been going to ruin, and the weeds and the briars and the poisonous plants have been springing up! O God! what the Church wants to feel is that Christ lived and lives still, the loving-hearted Christ that died, not for our selfish gain, but to heal the wounds of this poor world, and make an end of the sins of drink, lust, lasciviousness, and poverty that drag men down from decency and virtue. Oh, what if we have been sitting in our churches, and looking at wonderful chemical demonstrations between chemists that fight with each other and excommunicate each other about the precise explanation of how wine is made, while a number of good men are making and giving it to the hungry and the thirsty! What if, instead of working in the vineyard, we have been beating the air? Do not misunderstand me. I am making for one truth—there is another against it; but I think that is the one that we have got to make for nowadays. We want to say this to ourselves: "God's vineyard, God's kingdom—that is real. In my body, in my home, in my business life, in my church life, in my citizenship, in my human brotherhood, God's kingdom; and He does not make it Himself, He gives it to me to make with my blundering fingers, my poor erring heart, my ignorant mind." Oh, how God honours us when He makes us to be His hands, His eyes, His face, His spirit beating, throbbing in us! Why, then, we are

fellow-labourers with God when we make a home, a character, a neighbourhood, a church brighter, sweeter, purer, more Christ-like. And the kingdom of God is not outside us : it is us, men and women. Work out your own salvation with wonder, awe, and reverence, for it is God that is working in you, to will and to do of His good pleasure. May God's will be done in you ! Amen.

V.

A ROYAL PROCLAMATION.

PSALM CI.

I AM going to invite you to-night to a study of one of the Psalms, the One Hundred and First. I shall read it over, occasionally changing the words, and try to bring out better the sense. "I will sing [or, I am going to sing] of divine goodness and justice. To Thee, O Lord, will I sing." That is simply a prelude—an introduction—to the poem that follows:—

"I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will order my personal life according to the laws and principles of religion, as often as their claim on me comes home to me ; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart, with a heart conformed to God's will. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I abjure (put away from me) the work of transgressors. It shall not find any hold on me. A man of froward heart shall depart from me ; I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour him will I cut off ; him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.

"Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Me ; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve Me.

“He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within My house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in My sight.

“I will early [or, I will make it the first object and aim to] destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.”

The Book of Psalms has been the delight of the noblest and saintliest men of every age since these psalms were written. Testimony to their grandeur, their truth to human nature, their ennobling, comforting power has been borne not merely by believers, but by unbelievers. The book is one of the best beloved in the whole Bible. I suppose most saints would put the Psalms after the Gospels, yet in the book there are pieces that people listen to with an uncomfortable feeling when they are read in church, or when they are chanted. Words are used that grate on the ears. Things are said, and feelings are expressed, that sound to us in bad taste—to put it at the best, sentiments are uttered that seem to us to jar with the ideal of Christian character; and a great many psalms in consequence are not sung, and are not read in churches. Now I want to say to you simply as my impression of the book, that there is not one single psalm in the whole collection that has not a good right to its place in the Bible, and that is not fitted to help Christian men and women who are living at the present time. Only you must use the psalms rationally.

Now one of the first blunders we make is to take those psalms and insist that each one of them shall from beginning to end express our own personal feeling, and experience, and sentiments, and ideas.

But what business have you to do that? The poem was not written for you. It was written more than two thousand years ago. The poem gushed out of a man's heart who had his own history, his own education, and his own knowledge of God, and his own ignorance of God; his own darkness as well as his own light!

It poured out of his heart and carried with it the pathos of his struggle with the world: of his cry after his God, and of his battles with temptations. The psalm is his poem, his prayer, his song of adoration, not yours. Therefore, when a psalm grates on your ear; when it says things that you cannot say, when it thanks God for bringing the writer through the Red Sea, when you never came through the Red Sea, you feel that it says what you cannot feel and say for yourself. Well but then you ask me what is good of chanting those psalms, and of singing them, and of reading them in the church? Now in your church here, and in a great many churches, only a few well-known psalms are chanted, and if it is understood that those chants are an expression of the present feeling of the congregations, then certainly it is wise and right to freely use those of them that can be employed in that fashion. For my part I had sooner that the whole of the psalms were chanted in all our churches, if only it be clearly comprehended by everybody that the psalm is chanted for the edification and instruction of the congregation precisely as the chapters out of the Old and New Testament are read. If the psalms are to be chanted as our own experience then it is well that we use only a selection of them; but if the psalms are to be recited as we read the whole of Scripture, then it is a pity to leave

any of them out, for each of them has its own use. What is that use? Now when a man is either very joyful or very sorrowful, it is a law of human nature that he wants to utter his gladness or his grief aloud, and the most natural way in which he can do it is to say it in his own words, to sing it in his own poem, in his own music, or to wail it out in his own lament. That we do on our knees in our closet. We cannot do that in a church when we are all gathered together in a company ; then we must have a form of words. Now, when a congregation wants to do that the best thing is to use our hymns, because they were written in our language and are nearer to our thoughts. If we, who live at this point in the progress of Christianity, want a form of words to express our joy and our sorrow, then let us have our own poems, our own prayers, our own hymns of praise. But there is a law of human nature that comes in and tells a man that it is sometimes very wholesome for him when he is in great joy or in great sorrow to get away from himself. A sick man naturally talks about himself and his disease, and being human we do him an injury if we do not let him sometimes tell us his symptoms, and his feelings, and his pains, but to do that too much is morbid and unwholesome. It is a great duty we all ought to perform, the duty of self examination, of inner communion with one's own heart and one's own soul ; but you may overdo that introspection. You may indulge a narrow, self-engrossed, morbid, and unwholesome spiritual despotism. Sometimes the best thing a man can do when he is in pain is to be forced to look at something else. If he is in low spirits, compel him to look at something bright and cheerful as that may do him

much more good than wailing out his own pain. Sometimes if a man is beset by temptation too strong for him, the best thing is not to look at his own battle, and his own falls and wounds, counting them up, and being in distress; but get him to come and look at some other man that has fought with the devil out in the wilderness, and been stricken down like him, but at last was a conqueror. I sometimes think that one of the best things we can do in our sins, and sorrows, and temptations, and struggles, as well as in our joys and prosperities, is never, never to shut ourselves up within our own little self, but come out into God's world and see the doings of God and our fellowmen in the past history, in the present prosecution of the battle of right against wrong; get into the sight of other men, and sympathise with their sorrows, and their fears, their defeats, their victories, and that may give you heart and courage and wisdom to fight your own battles. Now, do you see how the psalms can be used? Never take a psalm that wont fit you, and make it mean something else that it does not mean. For instance, this One Hundred and First Psalm; I do not know whether you have tried to take it to yourself, and felt that you could not so bring yourself to say what it says, when it says:—

“I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart and hate the work of the transgressors. A froward heart shall depart from me. I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour him will I cut off.” Well, you cannot say that, and so you set it down to mean: “I shall make it a rule to associate with the virtuous and good people, and I

will acknowledge the principles of religion in my own conduct and my home; and as for bad men I won't cut them off, but I will try to convert them," and so on—a most excellent sentiment; but you had better say this straight out in natural words for that is not what the psalm says. You may get a great deal of good from that song of Christian desire, but you are not singing or using for your own good the One Hundred and First Psalm. Well, now, let us try to carry out those principles. What does that One Hundred and First Psalm mean? and what use can it be to us? Well, now, I will put it to you what the things are in the psalm that make you doubt whether you can use it as your own. The things in the psalm that make you doubt whether it is quite in keeping with the principles and sentiments of the Bible are two.

First of all there is an unpleasant tone of self-righteousness about it. It is not that a man ought to resolve to keep nothing but the best company, to have nothing dishonourable or dishonest about him, but to walk righteously with perfect heart in his own life and home, to do his utmost to crush wickedness and evil. It is not that those principles and desires are wrong, but a simple-minded man won't publish that too much to the world, he won't proclaim it with a speaking-trumpet before him and certainly the psalm seems to do that. Then the other thing about the psalm is this that there is something truculent with perchance the element of violence in it. All bad people are to be cut off, driven away, punished, and put down by force. Is that the spirit with which good men should interpret their relation to bad men? Certainly not, and if that poem is to be taken as the

utterance of a private individual, then it jars on our ear and heart.

Suppose now, instead of finding fault with the psalm as a good many rationalists have done, and I suppose some believing people too, instead of passing it over when you read through the psalter, suppose we ourselves performed an exercise of humility and imagine that it is just possible that it is not faults in the psalm that make a difficulty, but that we do not quite understand it. I think any man proceeding to read the psalm in that salutary state of mind would soon have his difficulties cleared away, for the explanation really lies on the face of the psalm. The very difficulties are the key to its right interpretation. It has an unpleasant, presumptuous, arrogant, self-righteous tone if it is uttered by a private individual. It is, moreover, a violent truculent speech if it is the speech of a common citizen. Suppose it is not. Suppose this were a royal proclamation. Suppose when a young king was crowned that he conformed to the usual practice and custom of issuing an address to the people. What should you say then about the psalm? A man in an official position commits no offence against humility and modesty when he declares that in his official life and his personal life—so far as that is the basis of his official life—he means to be governed by the dictates of religion and of virtue ; he means to keep his own hands clean from all lawlessness, and vice, and crime ; he means to associate only with upright and godly men ; he means to gather round him just and wise councillors ; he means to put down all tyranny and oppression ; he means to exterminate crime out of the state. Could you, then, have a nobler, better declaration from a newly-

crowned king than that? Now, as a matter of fact, that psalm is merely the coronation proclamation of a king put into a poem, with a little preface that fits it to be taken up and uttered with necessary changes by all of us. Suppose we run over it now in order that I may try to bring out to you the meaning of it, and the significance of it. What is there of more value to the social life of a nation than that its monarch should be a man whose own personal and domestic life is pure, virtuous, and honourable? What grander influence could permeate through all ranks of society than the influence that comes from a pure court? We, under our noble and gracious queen, know—know by a practical experience—and we ought to be grateful to our sovereign lady, and to thank God for it—how much that means for the virtue and purity of the whole spirit and life of a nation. Now mark the significance of the opening declaration: the writer declares that he will conform to the laws and requirements of virtue and religion in his own person, and he will rule his household accordingly.

We know the infinite damage done when a member in a ruling house is unchecked in his indulgence, in corruption and in dishonourable practices.

Then, the next thing. What more deadly temptation to an absolute king and monarch (as the writer of this psalm was) than to account himself elevated above the common law, the statutes that he himself makes and administers?

Oh! those of us who know the history of human government in all ages, especially the history of all absolute dynasties, know how almost unbroken is that dark stain of lawless arrogance on every page; when

the monarch diminished the resources and authority of the law, and tempted his subordinates to neglect its administration because he with a high hand did not count himself bound by the common rules of justice and honesty between man and man. "I will have no wicked thing before my eyes." "Everything wicked I abjure ; it shall not adhere to me." Such a declaration as that made by a king is a mighty power for law and order and justice through all the land. If he breaks it that is another question of course.

The personal character, then, ideas, conceptions of this monarch will all of them find expression in his administration, in his executive, and even in the legislation of his kingdom. How infinitely important then that his own personal friends should be men of goodness, men of principle, men of justice, men of honour and of mercy. That is the third point.

Now, after that opening section of the psalm which deals with the king's determination to order his own private life and conduct and actions according to God's law and the law of the realm, then comes a second section which declares the principles on which he is to rule his kingdom. "He that privily slandereth his neighbour shall not be able to poison mine ear, never will I administer justice listening only to one side. Never will I send sudden death to any of my subjects or deprive them of their goods, because an enemy came and told me a lying tale against them, and I, like a reckless despot, listening to it and believing it and without inquiry, did a cruel act of injustice. When such tales are brought to me I will search them out impartially, and if they prove to be false and slanderous the man shall fall into his own pit—the slanderer will I cut off,"

Those of us that know history are aware that more deadly than poison and the dagger is that weapon of false, lying, mean slander poured into a despot's ear, and the quick outburst of reckless rage, suspicion, jealousy ungoverned by law and its slow orderly administration, has resulted in crimes without number. At the present day in some countries you have the large landowners and nobles grinding down the peasantry into wretched slavery and serfdom; the strong and powerful robbing the weak and the ignorant, all progress, all advancement crushed by them.

It has been everywhere of value to a nation to have a king that means sternly to put down oppression.

Now the next thing. An absolute monarch is unspeakably dependent upon his counsellors; with a stroke of a pen he may sign a statute that destroys the happiness or the prosperity of thousands of men, and if he is forced by the condition of things in his state to live in seclusion, and have no very direct personal knowledge of his subjects, oh, the curse if he has round him, as counsellors dwelling in his court, men who are not speakers of the truth, but are corrupt, dishonest men that have their own ends and aims to gain. How many a throne has fallen because the king drove from him every statesman who told him the truth, who said that taxation must not be pressed too far, that a worm will turn, and the common people rise against it! But the counsellors that flattered him said, "Crush the people with a high hand, tread them down when they complain." Oh! the madness of the counsellors, and the pitiableness of the king who has surrounded himself with men

like that. This king means to have round him faithful men for his counsellors.

The next thing a king must have is that his underlings—those that administer justice and govern through all the states of his empire—shall be men who respect the law, men of justice, of integrity, men that are not themselves oppressors and dishonourable. This king says none but the upright shall be his ministers. Then, last of all, what is the next thing indispensable to good government?

Ah! you do not want merely a benevolent throne; you do not want merely a good and virtuous and pure court; you do not want a philosophical and mild wisdom in your monarchy. Some of the most unhappy countries have had soft-hearted rulers. The king wields the sword, and the sword must be used. The greatest blessing to a nation is a constant, inexorable execution of justice. It is no mercy to let the wilful, deliberate, irreclaimable criminal escape; you may deter men from becoming criminals, but the first great object is to detect vice and crime, and the sword of justice must be used; crime must be rooted out and exterminated from the state.

Now we have come to the spring and foundation of this noble resolve, this real wisdom, this philosophy, this practice of just and good government. How is it that this king has conceived such lofty ideas of his position and duty, such a tremendous solemn sense of a great and awful burden and responsibility. "I will sing of eternal goodness and justice through the ordering of this world." This man has detected some great hand that is ruling and shaping its progress, and the great principles that run through it are to make for holiness, for goodness, for righteousness,

for justice, and back he has gone till he has looked into the face, till he has touched the hand of its Maker. It is a world ruled by God, and so the monarch's kingdom is no longer his in absolute right; he is but the ruler of a province of God's kingdom.

But neither you nor I are kings, and all this is far away from our life. Is it? You fathers, you mothers, masters, mistresses, have each of you your little kingdom, your personal conduct, your own character, your associates. The friends you bring to the house, the company you keep, are they worshippers of the world and wealth, or are they men that love God, and honour, and truth, and purity? Oh! you may teach your children all the doctrines that ever were invented, but the real teaching is your own personal character, conduct, and society, and your government of yourself. Do you listen to slander? Hear one servant's tale against another, and believe a poisoned story? Have you favourites among your children? Who are your counsellors?

I think it grows on me year by year that we want to preach that the God that we obey, or disobey, believe or disbelieve, follow or reject, the Christ that is our Saviour or will be our eternal condemnation, is not the God who cares about theories and elaborate explanations and dogmas; but that God and Christ who is in our every-day life, saying, "Do this for My sake, for your own sake, for your children's sake, for your fellow-men's sake; be just, be holy, be good; love the truth; hate the world with its sins and its gross worship of earthly things." Oh! we want that real, every-day religion, and how are we to get it? It looks as if I had forgotten, does it not, to associate this conduct with spiritual faith? But I have learnt

this: the way to get that virtue—do you call it, morality, good life, religion, obedience to God, and doing of Heaven's will? is to make Christ your supreme, ever-present associate, friend, counsellor, minister—to follow Him, you His pupil and He your master. That is the key to the practical lessons for you and me of this Old Testament song.

VI.

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED.

PSALM xlix.

I AM going to ask your attention this morning to the Forty-ninth Psalm. I shall read it over making a good many alterations in the wording of it, and in not a few cases quite altering the version of it that you have in our English Bible. In that way I hope to make the general meaning more manifest. The psalm begins with a prelude, or introduction, which fills the first four verses.

“Hear this, all ye people ; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world. High and low, rich and poor, together. My mouth is about to utter wisdom ; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding, clearing up all things that are difficult : I lend my ear to one of life’s enigmas ; I am about to divulge my theme to the accompaniment of the harp.

“Why should I be dismayed, distressed, disturbed in mind and heart, in the days of successful wickedness, when treacherous unjustness is all round about me, beside me ? Why should I be distressed at the sight of those who rely on their wealth, and boast in the multitude of their riches ?”

Then suddenly answering his questions : " Not one of them can by any means ransom himself, nor pay to God the ransom price of his soul."

Then comes in a sort of song : " For the ransom of a soul is a thing so dear that it always is wanting. Not one of them can by any means redeem himself from the claim of death." The idea is that none can pay to God the ransom of his soul that he might live on for ever and not see the grave. " Nay he shall see it, wise men do ; good men of God do, much more than those godless, brutish, sensual men must perish and leave to others their possessions. Their inmost longing is that their house might last for ever ; their earthly homes might be everlasting homes to them, their dwellings from generation to generation. They give their names to their estates as it were to bind themselves to them.

" The man of wealth without wisdom " (you must remember that wisdom means goodness) " is like the brute beasts that are slaughtered."

That makes the first great division of the psalm.

Then the next : " This is the way of those that are fools, and all men that side with them (adopt their way of thinking). Like sheep they are hurried to Hades, to the world of shades. Death is their shepherd. A righteous man shall triumph over them, when at last their form is mouldering in the dust and Hades—not their mansions and estates but Hades—that dismal land of shades is their place."

Then passing over to the other side :—

" When death comes to me God shall redeem my soul from the hand of death. He will take me, He will snatch me away. Fear not then when a man grows rich, when the wealth of his house increases,

but when he dieth . . . his wealth will not follow though he may indeed in life have blessed his soul—men flattering you when you do well to yourself—yet he must come to the generation of his fathers that shall never more see the light. The man of wealth without wisdom is like the brute beasts that are slaughtered.”

There is in that psalm superficially read and understood a strain of intense hostility to wealth; something that might easily be mistaken for a bitter grudge against earthly prosperity and success. One of the shallow-minded socialists of our own day—and mind you they are not all shallow minded—might take that Old Testament poem and think that in the writer of it he had met with a sympathetic soul. He might imagine that the poet accounts all accumulations of power, of social position, prerogative of money, and its immense facilities and capacities in the hands of a class of men, to be an evil. He might also think that in that poem he finds an echo of that bitter spite and hatred that poverty so often has at the sight of luxury, of refinement, of wealth, rolling by in its comfortable carriage. He might imagine that the poet is actuated by a spirit as narrow as his, as pettish, as imbecile, and as contemptible and wicked as his, but he would be mistaken. If there is any book that has a very proper respect for earthly success, for temporal wealth, for money, and prosperity, it is the Old Testament. The fact is, one of the commonest objections brought against the teaching of the first half of the Bible is that it represents God as blessing His own people with earthly abundance and prosperity; in short, it sets up wealth as the coin in which God pays for holiness. It seems as if the spirit of our psalm were

a condemnation of wealth, but you have only to read it a little more carefully, a little more exactly to discover the psalmist's true point of view. If you will read the psalm with care and do it justice, you will discover that the key-note of it is something utterly different. It is not wealth that the poet objects to, nor is it the concentration of wealth in a few hands. What rouses him to hate, and anger, and passion, is not wealth itself, but a certain aspect of wealth that is antagonistic to his own personal faith in God.

What makes it hard for him to believe in God, and in Divine justice, is that he sees this wealth put not into the hands of good and noble men, but into the hands of selfishness, of sensuality—worse still, he sees it forming the very bulwark within which men practise all forms of oppression and tyranny and injustice, robbing the widow and the orphan, pillaging and plundering the poor. He is forced to ask this question: "What has come of God all the time? How comes heaven to put wealth into such hands? Why does God not intervene? Is there any just government of this world? If so, why does prosperity follow in the tracks of bloodshed, of lawlessness, wickedness, heartlessness, and crime? Why, on the other hand, to honour, to honesty, to purity, to generosity, to those that fear God and strive to keep their garments unspotted by the world, why to them is there measured out poverty, oppression, and suffering?" That is the real point in the psalm; and I want you to think of the majesty of that attitude. If you take the poems of any other nation, of any other religion, I challenge you to find me one single hymn about human life or life divine that contains a strain like that. What is the pain in this man's heart? Is

it the wrongs done to himself? Oh no. That has been forgotten. That is swallowed up in an agony infinitely deeper and more awful. It is not his own sufferings which inspire the wail that runs through his song of agony and inquiry, but concern about the character of God. Now think of that. His friend up in heaven, his friend that he took to be holy, noble, great, and generous, seems to be not what he thought Him, great, majestic, worthy of our reverence, but wicked, unjust, hard, careless—No God at all.

That is a characteristic of a great part of those psalms, that strange pathetic anxiousness to justify the character of God; to vindicate for Him truth, righteousness, fidelity, justice, and mercy, in the face of those strange and awful problems of human existence that seem to charge the God that made our world with recklessness, with caprice, or with disregard of righteousness.

Now there is another point that I want to bring clearly present to your mind before we enter on a detailed study of the psalm.

It is this. In the Old Testament if you compare it with the New Testament there is wonderfully little said about the world that comes after this one. The writers of the Old Testament do not speak much about what God hath prepared after this life for His servants. On the contrary, in the Old Testament you see men rather shrinking from death, imploring God to prolong their days on earth, to give them a little bright sunshine more here in this world before they pass away to be no more. In fact, the very utmost that you can find in the Old Testament about a life hereafter, about the possibility of better and grander things awaiting in the world beyond for those that have

loved God, is no more than an uncertain and ill-defined hope ; but for the most part the chief thought of the Old Testament deals entirely with this life, with God present in this world ruling, judging, rewarding goodness, and punishing evil, in the present period of time.

It is not my subject, but I could tell you a great many reasons why it is well that the other world should have remained in the background. I simply want to show you one feature that is produced by that which had relegated it to the background. In the Old Testament we are enabled owing to that fact to witness a most interesting spectacle. Instead of having forced upon you a doctrine of immortality, full grown and complete, you can see it in process of birth, you can watch its natural throes and struggles, you can trace it as it grows, almost as if you could see the thin ethereal fibre forming, condensing into visible clouds in the azure of God's sky. It is one of the most exquisite, interesting, and attractive of studies, and it will tell you that the future rests upon a law of God's dealing with mankind, and with you and me in our own personal assimilation of religious truth and religious life. It is that God takes care never to give men things in advance of their capacity. What is the good if you try to force on a child instruments that he has no care to know the use of? You must first awake within him an emotion to make that exquisite music of a master that thrilled his own heart, then give him the musical instrument ; but you must first rouse the longing. Well, what God has done, what we see recorded over and over in the psalms and in the Old Testament, is how God woke up our human hearts to discover what was in themselves, the

grandeur of their capacities—to discover how utterly insufficient this world is and this life is for the faculties with which we are endowed, and for the magnificence of our being.

Now the poem has an extremely detailed characteristic form and shape. You are irresistibly forced to feel that the psalm was written for us: "Hear this, hearken to me, *all* ye people of the earth; *all* the inhabitants of the world, listen to me." You hear him begin like that, instantly you say he has got some very important message, something of large, universal, momentous interest. It is the proper art of an orator or poet to rivet attention. "High and low, rich and poor, all classes are interested in my theme. My mouth shall utter wisdom. Know, therefore, something deep, profound. The brooding of my heart—a thing, not a mere theory, but of real life interest—will be found full of instruction, of help, of guidance, to my listeners. I have gone and listened to the voice of God's Spirit teaching, speaking, and I have waited for the solution of the darkest and most painful enigmas as of our own lives, and what I have heard I am now going to relate to you to the accompaniment of my harp." You can see that poem and its use.

Well, now, so much for the preface, let us come to the theme. The theme is this: that miserable perplexity created by the spectacle that sees so much wealth, that ought to be a supreme blessing of all God's children, accumulated in hands that have no pity, no generosity, no justice, no fear of God, no love of men, turned into a curse of human existence. It is a big, a real, a difficult problem of this present day, that all of us have got to be interested in. Our

business, however, is with the Old Testament poet's encounter with that perplexity, and the way in which he set his heart to rest.

Well, now, the sight of wickedness, successful and prosperous, the sight of goodness and godliness wronged and injured, that raises the troubled question, Does not wickedness have the best of it after all? Is it worth while for a man to be honest when he only loses for being honest? Is there any God on his side? Is there any God at all? If so, does He care when His own people are wronged and are suffering, or is God on the side of wrong and of wealth? Has He turned capricious? That is the problem, the enigma, the painful puzzle.

Now here is the poet's solution. I must fall in, as it were, with the style of thinking by which he comes to it, and I must do it very rapidly. He says to himself that that is only the surface, the external aspect of the case. Suppose I try and look deeper into it. Suppose I tear off the garment, the smiling success, the well-being. Well, now, what does he discover? The first thing that suddenly flashes upon him is this, that when poor men and good men imagine that wealth is such a very great and good thing, they are no better than fools. Wealth, money, earthly position! Can those prerogatives and privileges do all that a man's heart craves for? That is a thing many of us would do well to ask ourselves when we are discontented with our own humble lot in life. Do you think for a moment £10,000 a year would make a man contented? Not a bit of it. He looks at the man who has got twenty thousand, and he cannot do all that he does. In this life man cannot feel his heart contented with

the millions of this world. More than that, the supreme, great, large joys of life on earth—will money purchase these? No. A labourer stands a better chance of possessing such than your wealthy merchant or your care-worn millionaire. The joys of home, the love of wife and child, friendship—to gain such, money is a hindrance rather than a help.

But the poet leaps over all those stepping-stones that will lead a man on to the complete solution. He comes with one great leap at once to the end—to the supreme, crowning disability of wealth. He says, "Look at those wealthy men, haughty, arrogant, strutting along boastfully, as if everything in the world was theirs. Look at that man who suddenly finds some deadly disease grasp the cords of his heart, and he is struck down. There, look at him now on his bed, gathering his rich brothers round him, imploring them, offering anything, anything to drag him back from the jaws of the grave, from cold, horrible death. Nothing, nothing, not one of them can redeem his soul nor pay to God a ransom to exempt him from death, for the price of a soul is so big! Heap up all the wealth of the world—it comes short, and the man madly clinging on to earthly existence, longing to live on for ever, and prolong his being here, turns suddenly on his wealth and denounces it for having deceived him. He curses the folly of the years during which he lived for it and thought it all in all."

Now that is the first solution, but with a swiftness that I had better copy, the poet hurries on to the next one, a new thought about this wicked, godless wealth and its evil, the mockery, the impotence, the contemptibility that lies at the heart of it, though

outwardly it seems so good, so beautiful, so perfect, so complete. The death of such a man is such utter disaster. Forced to face this inevitable doom as he lies there, day after day, with that horrible cancer, that fatal disease eating his life away, looking out on his estates and parks, thinking of his wealth, of his old enjoyments. Look into the man's soul—the eagerness, the longing to linger on, to remain, to get back to the old enjoyment; but this chill, cold flood of death, with its engulfing waves, sweeps all round him, dragging him down lower and lower, with its utter loss. The rich man gropes all round for any rock that juts above him, any point or fringe whereby he might escape. He grasps at anything, anything that does not belong to cold death, but finds nothing to lay hold on with the thrill of God's eternal life in it. All his faculties were earthy, all his enjoyments, of time, food, drink, sensual indulgence, all of them are engulfed in that black grave. Look at him clinging to his estates, his houses, his wealth; is there nothing he can do? He catches at a straw. He fixes his name on his estates that will survive. Aye! and he lies down beneath death's dark waves an empty, hollow sham. His name lives, but he cannot. He would if he could live on, enjoying his estates, but death swallows him up.

Oh! with what scathing irony the poet tears the hollow sham in pieces, that all in his death that he has to hope for, that all that survives him is an empty name. Look at him, great man, bowed to and worshipped in his life, arrogant, boastful, whom the perplexed, doubting saints sometimes fancied to have the best of it. Look at him now in his death.

What is he? No better than the dumb, brute beasts that are slaughtered. His death is on a level with theirs. Now, says the poet, come back into this world of sunshine and bird's song, of eager competition for money, where men sacrifice honour, peace of conscience, that they may heap up ill-gotten riches, where good men whose hearts cling to God, to holiness, who love honour, truth, and honesty, who want to keep their souls and garments unspotted, clean, are shaken by this aspect of wealth, of success, of prosperity. Come back into the world with me now from that deathbed, and look at that march of triumphal, arrogant, smiling, godless prosperity. What is it? Look at them (with the memory of that deathbed), where they are going with their high and haughty steps, successful, smiling faces. Oh! if they did but know it, like brute sheep being driven on by a horrible ghastly spectre. Death is their shepherd, hurrying them on to fill the grave with its cold and mouldering dust.

Such is the life, the career, the way of godless wealth, and of all those that think that it is the best, and live without goodness, without God in this world.

Now the other side of it. The man who has been true to conscience, the man who has been loyal to honour and goodness, the man who has listened to the voice of God and is striving to make his life one long responsive music to the touch of God's fingers, the man who for the sake of truth, the man who for love of other men, has given up his own pleasure, has borne scorn, contempt, and injury, the man who has suffered for the sake of sin—to him death also comes. Death comes to take away his

earthly home. Death comes to take away his bodily transient life ; his enjoyment of the sweet sunshine, and the fair flowers, and the blue sky, and the voice of wife and child and friend. Yes, death comes and takes them all away. But in that hour the voice Divine speaks within him. There are for him memories of hours when he spoke to God in prayer, and God spoke back to him. There are memories of those days when his heart rested itself on God, and he is at peace.

VII.

THE COMPLAINING LABOURERS.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called but few chosen.”—MATT. xx. 1-16.

SOME of Christ's parables lend themselves to enforce several lessons. Besides the great central figure, there are subordinate characters intro-

duced with a special didactic intention. But a great number of those beautiful stories employed by Christ in His preaching, though they are drawn at length, and contain an elaboration of scenery, nevertheless may be used to teach only one single truth. There is no more common mistake than to take a parable of that description and go through all the details of it, and the secondary figures and images in it, and try to find there great truths about God or about men. A great deal of mischief has been done in that fashion, and perhaps a still greater deal of error has been taught about the gospels.

It is not easy always to make quite certain what is the central purpose, and the legitimate teaching or doctrine of some of those parables. This one that I have read to you is one of the most complicated, one of the most delicate and difficult to handle, and if you go to commentaries and books that explain the parables, you will discover there a whole host of interpretations and meanings.

Now I am not going to discuss all these in detail, but I think it is worth while, before we take the parable in hand, to try to read it for ourselves, just to make sure that we have got out of our minds some ideas about it that are not uncommon. For example, a very familiar use of the parable is to prove that the joy and happiness of heaven, the blessedness of the redeemed, is not earned by work done, is not given in payment of merit, but is all in all a thing of God's free grace. Now that, as it is taught by intelligent, evangelical theology, is a great truth. Our whole redemption, our escape from sin, our inheritance of eternal glory, our possession of life everlasting, of holy character and likeness to God, that is one large,

complete, and entire gift of God's goodness. But our parable was never spoken by the Divine Master to illustrate that doctrine. If it were so intended, then it would be a very faulty and defective illustration, for, mark you, in the parable some servants were to receive a penny as payment. A bargain was distinctly made, and they got their payment. It is only those that came in at later points in the day to work in the vineyard that receive a sort of grace and yet again, not altogether of grace. It is grace that the master employed those unemployed labourers at all ; but all the same in common, each man equally, they had done something for the payment that was allotted to them. Again you will find that a good many interpretations endeavour really to destroy the main purpose of the parable. There is one interpretation which says that though all the labourers got a penny, the pennies were not of equal value. Those that came in last, or at late points of the day, only got a bronze penny, those who had worked longer a silver penny, and those from the early morning a golden penny—and so they were all equally paid. Now you see if that were so, then one of the most important points in the story has been forgotten, left out. But another method of interpreting the parable and clearing away what is supposed to be the stumbling block in it is this. It is said that, after all, it was just that all those workmen should get paid alike, because those who came in the morning were lazy and they did not work hard. Those who came in later worked at a greater speed those who came in at a still more protracted point of the day were stimulated to extreme exertion, those who came in long after the others at the eleventh

hour, worked twelve times as hard as the others : so it came out that in actual work done, they had all of them earned a penny. Now I do not need to say to you that that interpretation lets into the parable a thing, which, if it were intended, would have been painted in the very face of the picture ; we should have been told all that. Moreover, I do not know how it is with you, but an instinctive feeling tells me that that is breaking the back of the story, twisting, mutilating it. All the same, we admit this about the parable—although we have studied it and formed our own opinion about it—that we are conscious of something underlying those attempts to explain the story away. Perhaps you yourself have said : “I do not see but that those men who grumbled had some cause for their complaint. It does seem a little unfair, that a set of men who toiled for twelve hours should have had to work all through the long hours of the day, beneath the burning noontide sun, and get no more than the men who came in at five o’clock in the evening and worked one hour in the cool of the day, it does not seem quite fair.” It is precisely that feeling that has produced those two interpretations, and a whole group of interpretations like them.

Well now, I think that that feeling would have vanished if you could have once heard the parable read in the fashion that Christ spoke it. If only we first could have heard it ringing from His lips, and seen the flash of His eye, and caught the varying tones of Christ’s solemn sarcasm, and then the fierce, withering contempt in His face, we could not make such a mistake about His meaning. First of all, we should have grasped this quite plainly, that it was not a mercantile transaction that was being rehearsed in that story.

The first set of men at the beginning of the working day are hired in the market-place ; that is a commercial transaction at all events, and is justified as such. But this householder is a good man, he knows there are poor men with children depending on them, who are out of work, who are penniless, who are hungry, whose hearts are sore at the thoughts of going back to their little ones at night with nothing to put into the children's mouths, and so, though he does not need so many men, out of the goodness of his heart he goes back to the market-place when two or three hours of the day are past, knowing that there will be men there that have been round the whole district seeking work. He comes, finds them, and says : " Go into my vineyard, my friends, the day is broken, you have no claim, but I will give you what is reasonable and right and fair, go in and work ; " and once again he goes at a later hour in the day, and after that he goes to see if there are any more, and he finds them and sends them in, no bargain made. " You go." It was a deed of loving-hearted kindness he was doing.

Well now, when the day is done, what should such a man with such a heart do ? Say to his steward, " Steward, take your ledger, and put down the men that have worked the whole day, give them the regular wage of workmen, a penny ; then those that came in three hours later, well, deduct three hours and see what that will come to ; and then those that came in at the sixth and the ninth hour, pay them accordingly ; and those that came in last, give them the twelfth part of a penny " ? No, this man does not do so. This is not a bargain, not a mercenary transaction, but meant to put food into the mouths of those men and

their little ones one way or another, and what does he do? Act according to the hard rules of political economy, that is so worshipped now-a-days? No, he says, "I am going to be good to these men; give them as much as is needed to provide a proper subsistence for them." Now, mark you, it was against a man with a spirit like that, doing deeds of that description, that those men grumbled.

Have you read the parable with the slightest feeling that they were justified in so doing? . . .

Christ pictured the big, generous heart of that capitalist and the poor men there so glad to have got some work to do. Now in the largeness of the man's heart and generosity this thing did not occur to him that the first set of men would want more. That kind of heart did not think of that greedy, envious, grudging feeling, but thought that everybody would be glad and delighted.

"Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny?" and you have got it. "Take that thine is and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is not it lawful for me to do what I will with mine own." I have paid you what I contracted, bargained for. Who are you with your mean, complaining, envious soul to grumble at me because I am charitable? Is thine eye evil because my heart is good. So—says Christ—those that might have been first in favour and first in repute, stood last. Stood last in their master's esteem, stood last in social repute; the badness of their spirit spoiled the superiority of their services.

That, I think, is the meaning of the parable.

Well, now let us see why Christ told it. The parable makes the conclusion—the last sledge-

hammer blow in a dialogue between Christ, His disciples, the Pharisees, and the Scribes. So I ask you to come back with me to the beginning of that talk between Jesus and His disciples:—A young man, highly educated, with a pure, honourable, devout life, and a great dream in his soul of doing something heroic, of being good beyond the common; of standing out a leader in the cause of God, of God's people, of God's kingdom ; and in all that goodness, and in all that chivalry and enthusiasm of a pure, noble, religious youth, though with superficiality and over-estimate of himself, dreaming that there was nothing that he could not do that any good man could propose for him to do came to Jesus, and said, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" and Jesus looked at him, and as He did so He loved him for his goodness and his enthusiasm. Ay! perhaps for his youthful weakness, too. Jesus looked at him and loved him—loved him with an attachment that wished to bind that youth to His own side. He loved him so much that He wanted to have him as one of His own followers, to be one of His own disciples, one of His own apostles. He was just the sort to be a true friend of His, a hero of the gospel, and so instantly he said to Him, "You want to do something heroic. You want to do something big for God, for goodness. Well, go sell all you have and give to the poor, and follow Me. Help Me to build up the kingdom of heaven on earth." It was the grandest offer that the Son of God could make to men, and it was made, not in a hard-and-fast fashion, as you will find some of the commentaries explain that story, but it was made out of honest love and liking for him. "Come and

follow Me." But, if you are going to follow, like Peter, James, or John, you will have to wander all over the earth in hardships, dangers, perils, penniless. You cannot have your big estates, and your mansions, and all the rest of it. You will have to part with them, and you had better part with them now. Give them up to the poor. Come and be a hero for God and for righteousness. I can see that Christ standing with His eyes glowing with hope with love, watching that young face, and then I can see that light die out of Christ's eye and the sadness gather on His face, as He saw that young face fall and slowly lose all its fire, and the head begin to hang down; and then as He beheld him without one word as he, oh, so sadly and reluctantly, turned to go away from that high calling, Jesus and His disciples stood looking after him thinking various thoughts. The first to speak was Jesus, as if He were expressing His own disappointment—bemoaning the difficulty of it—"How hard it is for a rich, prosperous man to enter into the loftiest grandeurs of the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man—whose riches hold his heart fast—to enter into the fulness of Divine love." The disciples heard that with amazement. What! Hard for a rich man—they did not catch Christ's point, I think, rightly. They did not quite understand what had passed between Him and that youth, but they heard Him say that it was peculiarly difficult for a rich man to belong to God's kingdom. The Old Testament does not say that. On the other hand, it seems that riches, prosperity, power, prestige, are poured out on God's people; and now Jesus says it is so hard for a rich

man, harder for him than a poor man to enter the kingdom of heaven ; and if He said it because He loved that young man, and He was making the excuse for him—so hard for a rich man to use his riches with complete self-sacrifice and self-denial for the building up of God's kingdom. So the disciples said, " If it is so hard for a rich man, a man whom God has been so good to, a man who can do such deeds and give such alms, a man who can devote his time to the study of the law, and works of religion, if it is so hard for him to be of the kingdom of God and to work for the kingdom of God ; where, then, is there any hope of salvation? How will the kingdom of God ever be built up?" Christ meets it with the answer—"With men impossible, with God everything possible." I think the meaning of that is this: those disciples had settled it in their own minds that the most powerful factor in establishing Christ's kingdom on earth was to be wealthy men, of high birth, and earthly prestige; and Christ does not, by detailed argument, refute that, nor minutely deny it. He simply says something that they have been forgetting. He does not say it will be by the endowment of the poor, and the weak, and the humble; He does not say that, but He lifts the whole thing to loftier heights. It is not man's doing at all. It is God's doing, not man's at all. All this time Peter has been, I think, listening to Christ; but an under-current of thought has been running in the man's soul, and now it comes to the surface. He has said to himself, " See how sad and disappointed the Master is because the rich youth has refused the offer to be one of His apostles. The Master says that it is a supreme triumph, a magnificent achievement for a

man to be able to give up all he has and follow Him. Now He says that it takes the very action of God to accomplish it, and that is what we have done. What this young ruler would not do we have done. What is so hard, almost impossible, it takes God's Omnipotent help to do, we have achieved. We have given up all to follow this Jesus." Ah! Peter felt the splendour and the grandeur and the reward-ableness of his deed as he had never felt it yet, and so with such a horrible clashing discord from heaven down to earth the base, mean man in Peter spoke out: "Master, we have done it. We have given up all and forsaken everything to follow Thee. What shall we have, therefore?" It was very human. What did it mean for the holy, lofty heart of Christ who with such men so lovingly communed, and dwelt and made the pillars of His kingdom? You see Peter, in the very moment of rejoicing, falls into the spirit, the disposition of that young man. The rich young ruler went away because he could not sacrifice self and his own advantage; but Peter's ambition, self-seeking, draws him to follow Christ, and suddenly, in the very moment when he is exulting in his self-devotion and sacrifice, with identically the same spirit that made the young ruler refuse to follow Christ, Peter is proposing to follow Jesus for "What we shall have therefore."

A man out of self-seeking may refuse God's high calling, a man out of self-seeking may accept it, and which is the more deadly danger God only knows.

Now it was a very difficult problem Christ had to solve, in rightly answering Peter, because it is true that goodness has reward. It is true that in this world, and in the world to come, purity, virtue, love, self-

sacrifice are paid by God a hundred times over. So Christ daringly, nay, generously, magnanimously, largely proclaims the rewardableness of goodness. "Yes, Peter, you have forsaken everything for Me, and you shall have your reward, your reward on earth and your reward in heaven; nor you alone, but every man to the world's end that gives up anything for Me—father, mother, brothers, sisters, home, lands, wealth, time, no matter what, he shall have it back a hundred times over." How? In this way, in a very real way (though I do not want to say that Peter quite understood the fineness and the heavenliness of what Christ was promising any more than his fellow-apostles), in the vocation to which Christ had drawn them in its superiority and elevation, in this way they had abandoned home, brothers, sisters, friends. Aye! but think of it, as those apostles with warm, glowing hearts, went out through that world and brought hope and new life to poor despairing souls in every town, in every country, they had abandoned the love of one or two brothers, sisters, or friends, and they had got the love of a countless multitude of hearts and lives they had beautified. Ah! the wonderful love, the wonderful love that there was in that Early Church, and the humility, gratitude, homage, and love shown still by poor souls when we comfort them, or by sinners when we show them how to be clean again. If any man says he is not paid a hundred times over he has not got the right heart; he is not following Christ, and serving Christ for love of Christ and love of men. And to those apostles Jesus promises that they should sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. I do not think

it literally means thrones—literally judging in the world beyond, in the regeneration when Christ sits on His throne. I will tell you how we can already see that pledge of Christ in process of complete fulfilment. What is Christ's throne of glory since He died for our world and loved us as no other ever loved the sons of men? It is the throne in the heart of mankind, controlling, elevating the thoughts and determining the social, political, intellectual welfare of humanity; and with Him are the men that sit judging, masters of all that is finest, grandest, truest, most vital, bursting with promise for the future in the life of our world to-day; the men that took that gospel from the lips of Jesus and carried it into our world. Already they sit on the throne judging, governing, controlling, leading forward the march of humanity. But now the danger—Christ adds a warning—"Magnificent is the promise of reward to you; but remember you might lose it all—or you might lose the best part of it—if you allow your hearts to be misled by it. If, instead of being animated by love to God and love to men, you should propose to yourselves to be the world's apostles for the sake of the honour and the reward that are to come to you, ah! then of you it would come true that those who should have been first shall come out last." Then, instead of working, reasoning with them, swiftly with impassioned voice Christ told that story. He imaged to them those men of mercenary spirit, and condemned the meanness, the baseness, and grudgingness within them, the condemnation that falls upon them from the lips of the man in whose service they were first, but in whose good opinion, through their mercenary spirit and selfishness, they stand last.

Is that the practical lesson? I will tell you the thing that I think we have seen many a time in the history of the Church. It is not every great leader, every prominent and powerful preacher, every evangelist who has numbered his conversions by the thousand, that ends his life with the admiration, and love, and trust, and gratitude of Christendom. How often have you seen a man deteriorate as he grew old, become arrogant, become censorious, become bitter, resenting the action of his brethren if all honours be not heaped upon him; demanding in a tyrannical way that his will shall be done. Is it that insensibly he had forgotten the first love, the first simple sweetness of his faith; that there has crept in self-seeking, that he has cared too much for the honour and influence that came to him? Oh! if you go back to the Early Church history, go back to the Reformation, over and over again you will read that story of the end of a noble life tarnishing the lustre and splendour of its beginning. What does it mean? It means this: it is not enough to do good work for God and for men, but we have got to do it in a right spirit. It means that God cares infinitely more for a fair, sweet, noble, loving heart, than for the grandest external achievements. Do you wish it should be otherwise? Ah! it puts heart into us when God reveals to us that that is a supreme law of His kingdom hereafter. Not what a man is doing, but what a man is; not by his heroic purposes and magnificent achievements in this world of ours, but according as he holds within him the sweet, gentle, unselfish lovingkindness of Christ, shall be his best service to the Father that is in heaven.

VIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

“Jesus began to speak to them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.”—MARK xii. 1-9.

THE parable is a panorama of pictures that tell the sad story of Israel's career in our world's history. It contains universal truths as applicable to you and me as to that people. I am concerned tonight to pick out of Christ's story those things that are of practical importance for us to know and remember in the management of our own life. The parable contains a great deal. It touches upon some of the darkest and most mysterious problems in

human existence. It throws a light—not light enough to solve all the enigmas, but light enough to comfort our hearts—upon some of those questions about God's dealings with men that pain, and trouble, and perplex us. In the parable I find a sharp practical answer to the question many people are putting as to why life sometimes turns out so unpleasant for us that we ask whether it is worth living. In the parable, too, I find at least a hint that throws some sunshine upon that dark, mysterious fact of a great Divine election—God giving to some men happiness and prosperity and wealth, and to others disaster, pain, poverty. I find in the parable also some suggestion of rest of heart and consolation in the face of the dark mystery of our world's sin—of the ruined lives that are all round us, and the query that will rise up in the feeling heart how a loving God can have it so. Perchance, too, just a gleam of light is thrown on the question, the answer of which lies away beyond the grave—What is the future of human souls in that world where the judgment is?

Now I want to say this, and to ask you to take it in the same spirit in which I say it. I am going to handle these complicated and insoluble problems, not with any idea that I am clearing away the darkness and the clouds all about them, or that I am solving them, or speaking with perfect accuracy about them. I am persuaded before I begin that the things I shall say will be very partial, very fragmentary, broken bits of truth, and perhaps not an exact interpretation of Christ's words; but I have come to think that perhaps the best kind of preaching to men is not to be invariably very careful to be precisely accurate and

exact. The body of truth is sometimes dissected by a kind of theological anatomy, as if we were experimenting with a corpse. It is almost better to stir men's hearts and souls about God, and about His dealings with us, so that they are roused out of their apathy. Almost I would venture to say that a book that is erroneous, but that compels good orthodox men and women to think about God, and souls, and sin, and salvation, is a useful book.

Now I ask you therefore thus to take the things I shall say to-night, merely sketching out thoughts and ideas, with caution. I beg you to remember it is not all I have got to say. You would not probably allow me the time to exhaust all the lessons of this passage, even if I wanted, and you might not be the better for it. It is only certain ways of looking at things that I have found suggested in the parable which I wish to bring before you.

Now the key-note to what I am going to say of the parable lies in a request I am going to make to you to forget almost everything else in it except one great central figure, the image made in that story told by Jesus, of God in His actual dealings with Israel, and in His actual dealings with you and me, and every section of mankind. What is the picture painted by the hand of the Son of the great Father we have never seen, whose hands hold the reins of our world's course, whose heart and will determine the issue of our human story? It is not a picture I should have dared to paint; it is not a picture that would have entered into the heart of men to conceive, if it were not traced so unmistakably by that Divine holy Son of Man and Son of God, who knew God because He was one with God. I should have almost counted

it a blunder, a noble, magnificent guess, but one that had widely missed the mark.

A man built a vineyard, prepared the soil, planted the vines, erected a winepress, set up a walled tower, and put in it labourers, eager to get the fruit of his vineyard. He takes so much pains ; he spends so much thought ; he makes his arrangements so complete. There is a purpose in the detail of the parable. You cannot doubt the owner is in earnest ; prompted by a real heart longing to have the fruit of his vineyard. And what does the picture go on to show us ? In the autumn time, when the vintage is done and over, he sends a messenger to receive the profit from his servants, and he is refused. But so eager is he to have the fruit of his vineyard that he sends another messenger, and a still more rude and desperate refusal is the result, and he sends more messengers who are greater and more influential, and those rebel labourers take them, and misuse them, and wound them, and stone them, and kill them. But still the owner goes on sending, and it is all in vain ; and at last he thinks that he will send his own son, for surely they could not refuse him ; and he sends his son, and they take that son and kill him. Then there is nothing more for it, he has to send armed men, who drive out those labourers and destroy them.

Now what is the picture ? A baffled, thwarted, disappointed man, the longings of his heart resisted to the very last—and that is God. God whom we in a one-sided fashion are apt to think of as the Almighty, Omnipotent, resistless Sovereign Being, who never knew an ungratified wish, who wields unlimited and unmeasured power ; who has His way in the armies of heaven and the hosts of earth. And Jesus draws

the veil aside from the heart of that great God, and bids you and me look into it and see there yearnings that have been crossed and thwarted, and the heart-sick longing and eagerness to get the desire of His inmost nature, and it is all in vain—a disappointed, baffled, thwarted God.

Now remember that is only one aspect of God, one tiny fragment, one single side of the many-sided immensity that makes God. That is a picture of God the incomprehensible, translated into our human speech, speaking of God as if He were altogether such an one as we are, because we cannot speak of Him in any other way. If our infinite Father will make us know Him at all He must use baby language to us—He must speak as though He were small like ourselves. Yes, deduct all that, but nevertheless the imagery contains a truth, that anthropomorphism which is only one tiny fragment, a portion of the whole truth about God. There are other sides of His nature and His being that seem to stand all in antagonism to it. All the same this aspect has its reality. Jesus declares it, and we have got to believe it and to use it.

Now here is the first use that the parable suggests. What are you in this world for? You, the commonest, most matter-of-fact, prosaic of human beings; poor, ignorant, with nothing wonderful about you. In your little day's work—keeping the house clean, toiling in some manual occupation—busy at a trade, in a shop. What are you there for? To do the best for yourself? To get money and enjoy it, and to take things as easy as you can? Where is God? What is the world? Think what you are. You call yourself commonplace. Ah! the scientific men with no religion about

them call you a miracle, a wonder, such a piece of machinery as no human ingenuity has ever come within sight of contriving or dreaming of. A human being that thinketh, liveth, with hands, with thoughts, with a heart. Ah! and with that strange awful consciousness of right and wrong—that strange voice within you that speaks of things as sin, that sends a pang through you when you do your first dishonest act—tell your first lie—do your first cruel or selfish deed. What are you here for? Well, unless you are going to be an atheist, you must believe God made you, and God made this world, and God put an infinitude of thought into not another world but this real world, with its carpenters' shops, with its houses, and with its necessity of work that means so much for happiness, for comfort, for help, and that has got to be done with painstaking honesty. What, then, is the chief end of your being, the reason why you are in this world, in a workshop, behind a counter, in the rooms of a house, as a mother, as a servant, as a daughter, in whatever occupation or position you may be placed? The reason is What? To enjoy yourself? Never, never! Where would be the dignity of your life to selfishly do the best for yourself? You, as it were, take a knife and cut off all those cords and fibres with which the real God, that made our real world, had woven your life into all the other lives around you. You are here to do your part of the world's work in the name of God, and for God's sake, and you are thwarting the will of God if you, to use plain words, scamp your work whatever it is; and you are doing the will of God if you take a pride in it, and if you do it honestly. But you smile and say the preacher is making too much of common things. Of course we should be honest, we should be

careful and exact if our work was something fine and lofty—if it were the care of the sick where a human being might die if we were lazy and indolent, and did not do what was entrusted to us, and what we were paid for. Or again if we were missionaries trying to save souls. No, if you scamp your work in the carpenter's shop you would do it as much in the pulpit, you would do it as much in the Eastern Mission, you would do it as much in the hospital. Mind you, the people who have that work in their charge may sin as shamefully as the tradesman, as the servant, as the daughter. Ah! honesty is honesty everywhere, and the will of God runs right through your whole being and your whole life. It does not concentrate itself narrowly on your intellect, or on your heart, or on Sunday in the church, or when you kneel down to your prayers, or when you sleep. God runs through every moment of your life, into every word you speak, into every piece of work you take up and do. That is what the parable means; that every man, whatever his place in the great wonderful organism of our every-day world, has got something from God there to do, and he has got to do it as God wants it done or to thwart God, and hurt himself.

But there is something beyond that in the parable, there is the suggestion of special privilege, of selected prerogative, of lofty and nobler position assigned to certain men. A vineyard is given, and out of the common line of humanity certain selected labourers are put in charge of it. Of course the first reference of the parable is to the Children of Israel. That nation is elected out of other nations to hold within itself a higher knowledge of the real God that should grow on into the full grandeur of Christ's revelation of God's mind and will for our salvation. Well, that fact runs

all through life, and it is one of the things that makes trouble. Some men have dignity and unique advantages, endowments, positions assigned to them. There is as an actual fact that thing which is so much disliked as a theological dogma—a Divine election ; but luckily nowadays it is not theology that has got to discuss and define that. Our modern science has almost stolen it away, and objects to theology having anything to say about it, and teaches it in an uncompromising fashion as no Calvinist ever taught it ; it only calls it by another name ; it speaks of it as natural selection, but it teaches that advantages go to particular individuals. It teaches too what was not always taught, unfortunately, in the exposition of the theological dogma, that they go to the most suitable. They are not disposed of by partiality or favour or caprice—they go where they are earned. In fact, the theory of modern science is all summed up in a declaration of Jesus that many preachers have stumbled at and tried to explain away : “To him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not—hath not by real possession what he seems to have—that show of property, shall be taken away.”

Well now, what are we to say about this that looks at us out of the parable, that election to privilege, to prerogative, to some lofty position, to power in the economy of this world ? Is it not a thing to be very pleased with, and very proud about, as though you were a fortune-favoured individual ?

That is the blunder made constantly by those who get and by those who wish they could get. Those men were placed in the vineyard—as an honour ? as a dignity ? No. To work—as a responsibility, a heavy obligation. It was a larger

task that they got, a more difficult charge. But you that would trouble society's feelings about the gradations of rank, wealth, power, genius, privilege, and suppose you that call yourselves disinherited could come to look at the thing as God means you to look at it, how different would be your feeling about the inequalities of fortune. This is God's idea of it. If one man has got a higher education than other men ; if one man possesses finer breeding, inherited because of his birth, he possesses it, not that he may strut across the platform of life and death thanking God that he is not like the poor, ignorant, illiterate wretches beneath him ; he has got it to help them up. Keep wealth to a chosen few if you wish to obey the devil and defy God. God's idea is, your wealth is yours to use. We want to carry that all through. In that you have got the solution ; I do not mean a practical one. I am afraid I am not a statesman to work it out practically, but you have got the solution in principle, in motive power ; the solution that will clear away all those difficulties, those pains and sorrows that spring from the wrongs of our social system. It all lies in this, that no man is elected to any advantage over his fellows for his own sake, for his own enjoyment. He is rather in the position of a man to whom finer and more powerful instruments are given, that by their possession he might be the servant of all the rest. And that is what we want to have everywhere—a resolution in the privileged classes not to keep their goods to themselves, but to live for those that are unhappy, to live for those that are dispossessed, to strive to equalise, to a common level, human happiness and goodness.

Now, mark you, the error made by those vineyard

labourers was precisely the misconception that I have been talking about. They wanted to have the vineyard for themselves. They forgot they were put into it to provide fruits for others, they wanted to keep it all to themselves. It was the same blunder that Israel made, constantly forgetting that its place in the world's story was to create a kingdom of God, and widen it by gathering other nations into it, and always the selfishness of their hearts made them aggrandise themselves—advance their own ends. That was why the Scribes hated Jesus. He would have taken the privileges, the emoluments, the dignities, the powers out of their hands, and they would have been nobodies. They could not bear that, they wanted to keep their vineyard to themselves, and it was taken away from them. That is a law of God that you may trace everywhere. Any organ in the body that wants to take nourishment from the common stock but does not fulfil its function, the body instantly discards it; disease, death begins in the indolent, selfish organ, and it must be separated from the body. An aristocracy—a thing, mind you, that has been a blessing in the world's history, and perchance to the world's end it may remain a blessing, whether it be an aristocracy of wealth, an aristocracy of intellect, of culture, of religion—makes itself a curse the moment it ceases to make itself materially serviceable, not to itself, but to the whole commonwealth. The moment it ceases to make itself practically serviceable it begins to die. It cannot live. Like the indolent, selfish organ in the body it becomes corrupt in itself, and the body must cast it out that its corruption may not contaminate the rest.

Now, it is very easy for good people in churches to see the faults and errors of classes in the secular world—defects in the political system. But human nature is the same in the Church as it is in the State. We have got to remember that same thing about our Church's history. We are gathered together into congregations with decent, reverent habits, bringing up our children to the restraints of Bible reading and family prayer, to gatherings of devotion through the week, to solemn services of praise, prayer, and preaching on the Sunday. What for? A privilege truly has been put into our hands—a sweet gift of God, an advantage, a prerogative over the unbelieving, the ungodly, the criminal, the vicious world outside. And why have we got it? To take care of ourselves? to secure that we get safe along the road that ends in heaven? To keep our children from going to bad and to ruin? To have a comfortable building, a comfortable post, and everything decent and respectable and pleasant for ourselves? That the disposition of a congregation of Christ's cross! The intensest selfishness!!! Why are you Christians? Why are we within the sweet, controlling, saving, purifying, ennobling influences of Christendom? For our own sakes? Has God elected us to eternal salvation, begun here on earth and bound to go on in heaven, out of personal kindness to us? No; He has elevated us that we may help those that are down, and bring in those that are out of the way. If you will read Church history you will find this, that whenever any portion of the great Church of Christ yielded itself to that selfish conception of religion that Church began to die, they did not save their own children. It was a dead Church, a selfish

Church, no heroism, no chivalry, no nobleness and manliness and warmth of heart in it. Oh! the horribleness of the atmosphere of such churches. Strong words these. Yes, and I take them to myself as much as I hope you will take them. If the Church is going to live, if the Church ought to be preserved by God, it can only be by doing God's work in the world, and you may measure how much it is doing the will of God by asking how much it is doing for the unfortunate, the poor, the sinful, the unconverted outside.

I must leave out some striking truths that are in this parable, and come to the crown of it. It is that picture with which I commenced, of God failing to get what He wishes, striving, struggling with a real heart-yearning, and yet defeated, baffled, disappointed. Is that true? I fancy some of you, my clear-headed hearers, have an idea that I am blundering a little. You say to me that cannot be, God is omnipotent, God is absolute monarch, Sovereign Lord. Moreover, the owner of the vineyard did have his way; he did accomplish his purpose in the end. It was only a temporary delay, but at last by force he secured the produce of his vineyard. Ah! yes, my friends, if it had been the physical fruit that he had set his heart on, but you have not read the parable with much heart instinct to feel the throb of Divine tenderness that Christ has put into it if you are blind to this, it was not merely the fruit of his vineyard that the owner wanted. If his supreme longing was to get it from those men, if it had been a mere tale of grapes, of wine, or money got by the sale of the vintage, he could very quickly have got that. At the first refusal he would have sent his soldiers to take

it by force. But instead of that, look at him, sending servant after servant, honoured, respected, valued by their master, risking their misusage, risking their death. And that is not all—sending his own beloved son into deadly peril and hazard. Oh, how his heart was set on getting those men to be good, to be dutiful—to save themselves from ruin, and am I not right, then, in saying that he was disappointed, baffled, and in that Christ holds him up as an image to you and me of God. What does it mean? Why, do not you see it?—obedience is a thing that you cannot obtain by force. Your boy won't obey you, he is rebellious. How are you to get him to be obedient? You can struggle and take his hand and make him do the thing you wish him to do. You have conquered his body, but not obedience of heart; within he may be hating and defying you all the time. You cannot compel dutifulness, you cannot compel gratitude, you cannot compel love. God Himself cannot do that. Obedience must be the voluntary submission, the willing consent of our free choice; and so then God is shut up to this, He can only try to get that from us by persuading us, by wooing us, by pleading with us, and entreating us; by playing upon our hard hearts with sweet influences of holy persuasion; but if we resist that, it does not lie within the arsenal of Omnipotence to use any other instruments. God has no power by a feat of almightiness to make a man love Him, and so you see, as the parable pictures, there is no alternative after God has exhausted all the resources of His Divine, loving persuasion to make men good, if they will persist in evil, but to crush them. That Omnipotence can do. God always has His will, but He does not always have

His wish. His decree travels unfailingly to its end, but the desires of that great, generous, loving, Divine Father's heart are often frustrated, thwarted, disappointed.

Now, I will tell you what that means to me. It means this, that God, having made in His own image our human hearts, loves them more dearly than any earthly father loves his children, and therefore no human soul will go away from God for ever into the blackness of darkness without God doing the utmost that infinite mercy has in its power to do to save that soul. That is orthodox, though it is a thing that is often forgotten to be said about God, and that is gospel. But now the other side of it, the fact that we are free to choose good or evil means this, that we dare not count on God's omnipotence to guarantee the ultimate salvation of all His people. I do not know about that future world. I do not think we were meant to know. I would welcome as quickly as any man that hope that some good, tender souls think they have a right to believe, that at last, somehow or another, God will find means to save every human soul. Pray God it may be so. But I cannot affirm that, just because this parable shows me that God can only do it by persuasion, and I do not know but that it may be possible for a heart that He made to hold out against Him irrevocably. But, on the other side, and that clears away all the real darkness and the pain that lie in that veiled future, and in the effect of sin and sorrow in this world, this I know for certain, that nothing God can do will be left undone for every single soul to save it from sin and ruin and eternal loss, and even at the very last, if it be possible for one of God's children to be lost from Him for ever,

it will still stand true that there will be in God's heart nothing but pain and regret and baffled longing and yearning over His own. That was so with Israel, of whom Jesus spake that parable, when the Son came after all the prophets had been rejected. Oh ! with what an impassioned yearning of heart He came. Remember how on Olivet He wept for Jerusalem that would not be saved. He did more than that—on Olivet He shed tears, but on Calvary He shed His blood. And Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

That is the God we have got to do with. You cannot think hard thoughts of such a God. Election, heaven, hell, are mysteries I do not pretend to know or understand, and therefore do not try to say what they are, and do not think it well to be very dogmatical about them beyond those ends of them that are near my immediate practical life ; but they may be dark, and they may be painful, as long as I have Christ's word for it that God is love through and through to the very last, using the utmost powers of infinite mercy, pity, and love for the good of every creature He has made. Ah ! then, His character remains unstained, whatever fears and pain may remain on the pages of our human story.

IX.

LIFE AND DOCTRINE.

“Take heed unto thyself and unto thy doctrine. Continue in these things, for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”—I TIMOTHY iv. 16.

TIMOTHY was a young preacher and teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This epistle was written by St. Paul, his elder and his father in Christ, to guide him and help him to be a good preacher and teacher of the gospel. This text, therefore, is a text for preachers and for teachers. It does not apply to many of you, then? It applies to every father; it applies to every mother; it applies to young men. When our sons get to be of a certain age they give far more weight to the doctrine of young men a few years their senior, than they do to the words of their mother, or the teaching of their father. It applies to every one in this church in greater or less degree.

Very rapidly, very briefly, and simply throwing out thoughts and ideas, I want to try to make you feel the practical wisdom there is in this counsel.

Two outstanding things are to be noted in the text; first of all, the connexion between our doctrine and ourselves. “Take heed unto thyself and unto

thy doctrine" ; and, secondly, the connexion between two great results : " So shalt thou save thyself and them that hear thee." That is not the order in which we might put those two pairs of things. Take heed, O teacher, father, mother, counsellor, to thyself, and then to thy doctrine. Take heed in order that thou mayest save thyself. But, surely, that is taken for granted. An orthodox teacher, a disseminator of Christian truth, a godly father or mother—all the concern of such is to save their hearers ? No ; take heed to save yourself. That is the best way to save them. " Take heed to thy doctrine." Yes, take heed to thyself, and thy doctrine will take heed of itself.

Now, let me just run over that chain of thought. I am going to take the things the reverse way. " Take heed unto thy doctrine." There is a deal of talk about doctrine at the present day, with some wisdom in it and a great deal of folly. Downright good people are going about saying, " Doctrine does not matter ; life is everything. Let a man follow Christ in his heart, and in his conduct, and that is all. It does not matter what he believes. The doctrines are empty ; they have no effect, there is no dynamic potency in them. The Spirit is all—the life everything." Now, if that merely means that doctrines unpractised, which are hypocrisy, are worthless, it does not say enough ; they are accursed. That is what Christ denounced in the Pharisees. To have the truth represented and promulgated by hypocrites, means ruin to the truth. If you want to destroy a child's reverence for God and holiness and purity, let him live in a house where a lying, mean hypocrite is always professing those things, and that lad will hate them.

But that is not just what is meant. I think that it is often taken to mean this—that it does not matter at all what a man believes ; it does not matter at all what a man teaches about God, about the human soul, about salvation, about faith and duty, if only the man's heart be right, and if he means well. Now, to a certain extent, that is true. There are doctrines and there are doctrines ; and I wish we had two very distinct names to indicate two utterly diverse classes of beliefs. If a man eats bread and meat every day, as much as he wants, it really matters very little if that man's doctrines about the chemistry of meat and bread are nonsense. He may be under utter delusions as to the way the meat and bread feed his body. If the man eats wholesome meat and wholesome bread, that is everything. If another man holds the most orthodox theories of chemistry and of physiology and of nutrition, and is not eating the actual meat and bread, then he dies. The other man lives in spite of his false doctrine. Now, that is true to a certain extent of theological beliefs. There are elaborate and subtle and noble theories about the inner, mysterious nature of God, the construction of Christ's person, the ultimate decrees of God, the precise explanation of how the dying love and obedience of Jesus Christ cleanses us actually from sin—theories and explanations of how these things are and are done ; and I am bound to own frankly that it does not matter very much what a man thinks about this. If a man with his whole full heart lives on the Lord Jesus Christ, and takes Him to be his real Saviour from real sin, and has His Holy Spirit dwelling in him—ah, he is feeding on the bread of life ; and even if his theories of how that bread of life

is life to us are not quite correct it is a small matter ; at least, it is a small matter by comparison with the case of a man who is for ever teaching and working and battling about the theories and the explanations, while his heart is a desolate howling wilderness, with no love of God, no love of man, in it.

But now let me say this. It is a pity that such questions should be raised. You cannot answer them quite rightly. You must give replies that may be misused and misinterpreted. There ought to be no such antagonism between life and doctrine. Still, if the question comes up let us speak the truth.

But now there is another class of doctrines—beliefs which are things not of the mere intellect, not of speculation, but which are convictions of the heart, which throw a man into a certain attitude towards God, and towards duty, and towards sin, and towards holiness. And it matters a great deal to a man what he believes about these. It counts for everything. But mark you, now, I mean what he believes not with his head, but with his heart, with his very being ; and the only faith that the Bible deals with and speaks of as saving faith, is not the faith of the correctest theological intellect, but it is a faith which is the outgoing of a man's soul, of his whole being. "The devils believe and tremble," and are devils. The poor dying thief on the cross believes with the despairing outgoing of his heart to Christ to make him a good man. Yes, and it saves him. If a man believes that fire will not burn him, he will pay for that heresy. If a man has a mistaken notion, how it is that fire has got heat in it, and how it warms and serves man, that does not so much matter, so long as he makes a rightful use of the fire ; but if he has

delusions about the relations of fire to himself, he pays for it.

Now, I want to say something about doctrines. I want to say it with a little personal feeling, because if doctrines are so trivial (doctrines meaning teaching), then preaching is hardly worth doing. But I believe in preaching, not as we ignorant, half-hearted men do it, but as the great saints and heroes of Christendom have done it. There has been preaching that has shaken this world. Pray God that there shall be preaching again that shall shake this age, and do much to bring about the emancipation of human society from all the evils that drag it down into the mire, and prevent us from getting the completed kingdom of God amongst us. It will be done by teaching—the teaching that comes with the very power of God in it. Doctrines? Why, the greatest thing within these last centuries this world has seen—the Reformation in Europe—all grew out of one new thought about God—or, rather, the recovering of a lost thought about God—a new grand conviction that God is the living, loving, warm-hearted God, a Spirit whom men worship in spirit and in truth; not the horrible, mechanical, materialised God of priestcraft and superstition. And pray God that the well-meaning men who would bring back that degraded religion amongst us may be baffled, and may themselves be enlightened. Ah, what made the Reformation? Why, it was that into a human heart came a conviction that that grand, great God must be greater than a man's heart, greater than an earthly father; that He could not hang the salvation of living, thinking men and women upon any priestly sacraments administered to their bodies;

that that was a degradation. That which is flesh is flesh ; that which is spirit is spirit. Sin is an evil, a disease of the human spirit, and it must be purged out by the very holiness of God's Spirit coming into their spirits, and God cannot make that pass through a transubstantiated wafer which becomes the flesh of Christ. Why, even if we had the flesh of Christ, it would only be flesh to our flesh ; it would not be sin-cleansing to our souls. That transformed the history of our race. Mark you what it did. It gave back to men the great, grand, majestic, living, glorious God of Jesus Christ ; and then it gave man back to himself. It meant that men and women, loved by that God, redeemed by that God, deal with God directly, with no priest between and no sacrament between, but heart to heart. It meant that those men and women were the very sons of God, not to be treated as children, not to be kept in ignorance, but to conquer this world, to think great thoughts, to see large truths, to claim for themselves justice, and mercy, and righteousness, and freedom, and liberty, and achievement, and invention ; and, therefore, you have seen a marvellous revival of human thought, of human society, in those revelations which have cast down tyrannies and emancipated the bodies and souls of men. And it all grew out of a doctrine ; but, mark you, not a theory of the intellect spun out of things which we knew nothing about and should not try to understand, but a great heart-belief about the living God. But, "Take heed unto thy doctrine," surely is addressed to men that are not orthodox ? No, Paul addressed it to the orthodox Timothy, "Take heed to thy teaching." But if a man has once learnt a form of sound words, surely he does

not need to be guarding, and watching, and studying, and examining his preaching and his teaching? Does he not? Do you think that, having once seen the truth, having once learnt it, will guard a man from perverting it? No, try that with any secular accomplishment. Learn a language, and then give over practising it. Give over pains to keep up your accuracy and your fluency; and how long will you retain them? How soon will errors creep in? Ah! I tell you that a great many men think that they are preaching the orthodox doctrines which they were taught, and through indulgence or slothfulness, or through the unconscious pressure of one-sidedness and error, which the mis-shapen make of every common, frail, erring man's soul and intellect imposes upon his thinking and teaching, they have gone far astray. I do not mean, perchance, that the man actually says things that are false; but, mark you, you may make utter distortion of God's portrait if you are always working at the bits you like best, dwelling on a one-sided conception of Him. Has there not been a deal of orthodox preaching that has utterly misled men about God? We in our Church are called Calvinists. I glory in being a Calvinist. If we are to think about God and God's ways with men, Calvinism seems to me the grandest, the nearest to the true conception of Him; but I am a Calvinist remembering what Calvin himself remembered, that our very loftiest and most successful attempts to express the truth about God are poor broken bits and fragments, and we misuse them the moment we say that that is all the truth, and the whole truth, and the perfect truth—bits and fragments seen through a glass dimly and darkly. But if we are to think

about His ways, perhaps that is the nearest to the truth. But I am bound to say this, that certain of the extremes of Calvinistic teaching have been taken, and in our churches and in our homes they have been used to give a picture of God that was a devil's lie. I fancy that there are men and women sitting in this church, brought up in homes by fathers and mothers whom they revere for the strength and grandeur of their moral character, and yet they bitterly regret that when they were little children they did not learn to think of God as the loving father of Jesus Christ. Nay, truths about God and Christ were so taught them as to give them false thoughts about God—for instance, the constant emphasis of His justice. The debt of sin had to be paid; the Father up in heaven demanded the blood penalty; and then the gentle, compassionate Jesus came and said: "I will die for them." True, but only one half—no, but a fragment of the truth. That taught exclusively made you feel that, while your heart went out to Jesus, you did not want to come near to God the Father; and yet the Bible says that "God so loved the world." It was He who sent Jesus to die for us. It was the Father, Jesus was always telling us, whose love it was that devised it all and did it all. And if God were in very deed, as we teach and believe, Father in heart to that Jesus, our dying Saviour, do you mean to tell me that it is a true conception to suggest that all the suffering was in the heart of Jesus on the cross? If you could not do a deed of self-sacrifice, if you had to have your son to do it, and you saw him there in such nobility, and in such exquisite love, enduring untold agony—oh! if you are a father your heart would be pierced with an agony as great. If God

were the Father and Christ the Son, that is true ; but when we were lads we did not think so of God. "Take heed unto thy doctrine." Oh, it is not so easy to be orthodox as we fancy ; and many and many a time, when we think that we are preaching and teaching the whole mind and will of God, we are misrepresenting God, and we are damaging tender souls.

Now I must go over the rest of my text very rapidly, and dwell on the remainder more briefly. What I have to try to show you is that, while our doctrine is that by which we influence others, the best way to keep our doctrine true and right is to look after our own heart. Ah, doctrines are one thing when they come from a man, simply repeated by hearsay at second hand, and preached just as things of the intellect, but they are another thing when they come out of a man's heart. Oh ! I think it almost has an unhallowed effect to hear the story of the Atonement argued out in a controversial fashion. Against people that are not sound upon it, how can you take this sacrest, sweetest, heavenliest deed of God on earth, and use it to strike blows and arguments, with human passion and controversy in your soul ? Ah, you do it ! Oh, I think the best way to refute error is following in your own heart what you say you believe—that God is so holy, that sin is such a pain to God, that yet God did not annihilate sin when it came into our human race, because He loved our race so that He wanted to keep us ; and so God has been suffering that existence of sin which is agony to the holiness of His heart, and God, at unutterable cost to His fatherly heart, and through the love of such a loving Son of Man, Jesus, has done such a deed in our earth as makes it just and right for God to carry on the

history of our race, and that shall bring out of all this pain and shipwreck and woe a harvest of redeemed souls, overflowing with love and gratitude to heaven for ever and for ever. When our hearts feel that, that is the doctrine we want to teach the children. In the Sunday Schools, in our homes on Sunday evenings, will you gather them round you? But I tell you that it is almost evil for them when, because we have got to give them a lesson, we, in the hard fashion, without reverence in our voice and in our face, and the tears ready to come to our eyes, speak of such sanctities. Oh, take heed unto thyself—preacher, teacher, father, mother, friend. Ay, and we need to take heed, for every one of us lives in such a worldly world, and every one of us lives in such a selfish body and mind, and every one of us is so ready to begin to worship the gods of this world instead of the God of Jesus Christ, that we need to take heed unto ourselves. Why? Lest we lose our own salvation, because we cannot save others except as we save ourselves.

Salvation—"save thyself." What does that mean? Take measures to cultivate submission to God, acceptance of an atonement that shall exempt you from hell hereafter? Do you call that saving yourself? Oh no; the real salvation that Jesus Christ came and died to give to you and me is a salvation here and now, to-day, in your house, among your children, in your heart. Are you a happy man? Are you free from self-reproach, and remorse, and shame? Are you the bright, cheerful, gentle, sympathetic, forbearing soul that it would be such a blessing to your children to have for their father, or for their mother? And if you are not, is it not

that you have not let Christ save you—save you here and now—save you and me from undue care and anxiety? Oh, I am going on to it at once. Your doctrine to your children, to your friends and companions and neighbours in this world—what is it? The principles you teach the little maidens and the young lads? The principles that you utter when you talk with your companions and your fellow-men in public? No, no! The strangers that meet you may be taken in by that; but what you are doing for the salvation of others is absolutely measured by what you are. There are men that go about in this world that hardly ever make a religious speech, that hardly ever put three sentences together to inculcate a doctrine, and yet the children that live with them, the people that come into contact with them, feel somehow, when they go away from them, that it is harder to doubt that there is a God. There is a grandeur in goodness, in honesty, in purity, in generosity. Oh, the shadow that a man lets fall on the people around him!

“Take heed unto thyself”—“thyself.” In our churches, I think, we make too much about praying in public and speaking in public, and all that. I have even heard a minister say that an elder must have the gift of utterance and speech. I do not believe it. It was not so with the best elder I ever knew, who did more than most men to make true Christian peace and love, and heartily desired to make the house of God a place where there was a living, Christian brotherhood, a bright place that little children liked to come to, and that the poor and the friendless young men and maidens liked to belong to, because it brought them friends

and kindness, and the belief that there were good people anxious to do them good. They know that there are plenty of people who ask them to go to the devil, but not too many people in this London who ask them to come to Jesus, and try to make their lives happy and bright. The man in the Church that did most to keep the Spirit of Christ there was an elder who could not for the life of him have made a speech on a platform or in a pulpit, or offered a prayer in a prayer-meeting—a silent man, who would have blushed to speak about his own religious experience. He could not have done it. But whenever there was a threatening strife, whenever tempers became heated in conflict, or office-bearers met to consider what was to be done in that church, when that man, simply without any speech, said what he thought, it had more weight than all the other speaking put together. I will tell you why. Because they were sure that he did not care about his own ends at all. He was an absolutely just, honest, reasonable man ; and because they were sure that, with a wonderful humility and devoutness that dared make no pretensions, he loved God, and had a great love for his fellow-men. Ah, his spoken doctrine was very little, but there was the doctrine of that man's life !

Brethren — members of this Church, fathers, mothers in your homes, young men down in your offices, where it is not easy to live Christ's life, less easy than even to speak it—take heed unto yourselves and unto your doctrine, that you may save, with a real salvation, yourselves and those you love.

X.

"NOT YOUR OWN."

"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."—I COR. vi. 19, 20.

"**Y**E are not your own." The declaration if it is meant seriously is a startling one. The natural thought of every human heart is the direct contradiction of it. If there is one thing that with an intense consciousness possesses every human spirit born into our world, it is the sense of mastery, of belonging to itself, of having power to dispose of its own self as it pleases, instead of doubting its right to count itself owner of itself. The thought that we have from life's dawn is rather that everything ought to belong to us. Look at a little infant, and see how it reaches out its hands after every single thing its eyes behold. Listen to a little child crying for the moon or the stars. It is disappointed because it discovers that all the world does not belong to it. Go back in your recollection to the days of your boyhood or girlhood, and tell me whether it was your habitual idea that you were an absolute

pauper, not even owning your own body or soul. Remember the dreams you had of what you would do in life, how you would conquer the world, how you would steer the vessel of your fortunes for such sunny skies, and to such sweet and rich harbours. Do not you remember how you planned out your career, the home that you would have, the honour, and reputation, and wealth, and the goodness too, and the nobility, and beauty of character that would be yours? Where are all those dreams? Did you find the world so easy to conquer? Are you to-day what you meant you should be? Where are all the poets, and the painters, and the sculptors, and the artists, and the statesmen? Ah! when it came to the actual starting you discovered that you could not just choose at random, you had to reckon with a great many things that could not be twisted to please your will. You had, first of all, to take account of what you could do, and then to see what openings there were for you. Sometimes a man is required to do a very noble act, to take the dream of his heart, that the feeling and capacity within him tell him might be his, and give that up for the sake of others—a son, for example, left to care for a widowed mother, brother, or sister—without a grumble or murmur, and steeling his heart against regrets, to go through with it manfully, and dutifully, and Christlike to the end.

And woman; she too makes the discovery that this world does not all lie open to her; that she herself is not detached from obligations and claims that are on her; that her choice and her pathway may be restricted in a hundred ways; that duty points in one direction and inclination in another.

I suppose there are more of us that have had to put away a thing we most wanted for conscience sake, or for love's sake, or for Christ's sake, than there are who have got what they wanted. Or you have seen sorrow where you prophesied joy; discipline and self-denial where you thought of indulgence; pains, troubles, toil, chastening, when you dreamt of prosperity. Any man who knows the depths of his own nature, any man who has lived thoughtfully, humbly—not blinded by pride and self-conceit—has come to know this with an intense conviction, that he himself is not what he would have made himself; that he himself does not stand free and detached, cut out from all the rest of the world, that he is but one part of a great machinery; a labourer in a mighty company, with a great overseer over them, having his own work to do, not what he wishes for himself, but what he was meant to do; held in his place by chains he could not break without sinning, and set to reach ends loftier, grander, greater than those that he places before himself. Such a man takes up the declaration of Paul here, and says, "We are not our own."

Now there is a vast deal of perplexity and pain and murmuring about human life, because people do not or won't accept their real position. What right have you if you do not belong to yourself to set it down that yourself is to be prosperous; that you are to be exempted from disappointment and loss; that you are to have the best things and not the worst things? What right have you to expect all this if you do not belong to yourself? But if you have started on life's pathway with the expectation that you are to pick and choose, and that you are to have a

good time of it, no wonder you are astonished at the way God treats you. He counts you His to do what He will with. Nothing capricious, nothing unkind, but what His great designs contrive for you, and for the world through you, and that must mean many a hard battle to fight, many a blow and wound to receive. Imagine to yourselves a soldier that should join an army on a campaign saying to himself, "I shall always sleep on a soft bed. I shall never have to trudge till I am weary ; my life must not be exposed to danger : but I shall have comfort, and shelter, and pleasure, and the prizes, and the rewards, and the honour, and dignity, and applause, when we come home again victorious. What a surprise he would get to find his real position ! A soldier ! why the very essence of the thing means that he has no will of his own at all ; that his very judgment is put away from him. He is never to choose or plan, but simply to go where he is bidden, to do what he is told, to face shot and shell, to think nothing of his life, to endure hardships, to fight till he is like to drop with fatigue, to go on the forlorn hope to certain death, that the army of which he is a part may march on to victory. That is our position in this world. Ah ! then how changed our attitude ought to be to the griefs, the sorrows, the losses, the disasters, that come to us.

I cannot help thinking that there is a great deal of bad theology and false religion about, because people won't grasp this elementary idea that God is using us as His soldiers to fight His battles on earth ; that God is using us as servants that belong to Him to do the great world's work, and that cannot be done without sweating at it, and getting scars and wounds in the course of it.

You hear people asking how God can be good and loving, and they should have to lose so much money in business through the wrong or stupidity of another man, or other disasters fall on them, and they ask whether it is not because God is very angry at them, and means to punish them. When they are trying to do God's will—doing the work needful to earn a livelihood—a heavy calamity falls on them, a father or a mother contracts a severe illness with all its loss and discomfort, or death comes and strikes a man down in the course of his duty. God angry! God punishing! God not loving you! Something wrong at head-quarters because that has happened to you! Yes, if you were sinning, if you were on the forbidden pathway when the blow struck you, then you are quite right to account it retribution. If it was your own negligence, or your own sinfulness that brought the disaster on you it was a penalty, but not if you were doing your duty. Figure to yourself a soldier put to do the most severe and trying duty as a sentinel, saying to himself, "The general does not love me, does not think of me as he ought, or I have done something very wicked and dreadful, and that is why I am put to this." Why, the chances are that he is the most trustworthy man the captain has at his command, and the most fitted for the post. Or does the man in the hottest part of the battle imagine it is a condemnation on him, or that some judgment placed him there? Nothing of the sort. Perchance it is no more than this, that the battle swept his way; it came in the general fight. How much healthier, how much happier would be our thoughts about the sufferings, the pains, the trials, the sicknesses, the partings that come to us through life, if

we just settled down to understand that part of the world's work, part of God's service, falls on us not for our merit or our demerit, but they just come across our pathway in the general great order with which God is fashioning our world's story. If we meet them manfully and dutifully the great leader marks our bravery and our courage, and joys in our heroism, and loves us through it all.

Do you count this a hard saying? Had you rather belong to yourself? Would you prefer that God should have put you into the world just to do the best for yourself? Oh! what a petty, small despicable life ours would be if God let us live like that. Oh! we want to feel God's ownership and to believe in it in discharging the common duties of life—to live with a sweet temper, with honesty, with uprightness, with generous brotherly love, with industry and pride in our work, being a good father, a good mother, a good man of business, honourable, fair, and generous: living a pure life, putting away the temptations, trampling down beneath our feet the sordid thoughts and values and estimates of the world, and living for the things that are ideal and generous, heroic and Christ-like. If we did but understand that in living that life we are letting the hand of God use us as an instrument; that really we are His workmen, His soldiers; that our life is being woven into that general great mass of heroism, of heavenly holiness and goodness that are the kingdom of God, with Christ at its head, its leader, its heart—we should help those around us to believe in God, and in purity and goodness too.

If we did but get rid of that error of calling those things secular and common that God accounts sacred

and heavenly, our whole life through and through would breathe with religion, and with the very heart and spirit of Christ. To live like that we have got really to understand and realise that we are not our own, but God's. It is not merely because God made us, and God preserves us, and is the preserver of this world and all that is in it, that we who are Christians here to-night are not our own. God has superadded to that primary claim of ownership a sweeter, tenderer, more sacred ownership. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." You thank God when you come to the communion table as you look back upon your bygone years; as you compare your life with the lives that you have known that have been shipwrecked, and ruined, and defaced, and disfigured out of all beauty and goodness by vice, by crime and sin. You thank God because you have been sheltered and protected from your own passions, kept from the fierce currents of temptation that were in the world round you, born in a Christian home with father's and mother's love and prayers round you, with a Sunday school, a church, the Bible ever speaking to you about the Holy Spirit of God—the voice of Christ appealing to you, the clasp of His hand at communion tables coming to you. At that crisis of your life when you remember you were dallying with temptation, and you were kept back, and here you are, to-day, safe, clean. Was that your doing? Was it the doing of father, mother, Sunday-school teacher? Where did they get the power? Oh! trace it as if it were a river away back, back from generation to generation. Where did it all come from? Out of the great loving, sinless, holiness-creating heart of a man hanging on a cross, dying there to break the trammels of sin, to

stir the heart of humanity to a hatred of all evil, a yearning and longing for cleanness, purity, gentleness, and love. From Him came those influences that have given you all goodness, all faith, all hope of heaven hereafter, and He died to give it you. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." Christ's, that is what you are. Oh! we want to make it simple and real—that is the whole of salvation, that is regeneration, that is redemption. Forget all the difficult doctrines and abstruse theories. Listen, listen, boys, girls, young men, old men, every one of you! Christ did that for you, if you give yourself to Him in a real way.

Have you said, "If I go on fashioning my life by the measure of my own little sinful self what a poor life that will be to look back upon from my death-bed and to go into eternity with! And there is the greatest, noblest, grandest, purest, most generous, most loving, most lofty heart, that ever lived, the Christ this world worships—almost the very unbelievers giving Him at least that worship of calling Him best, bravest, purest, grandest of men. He comes, and He says to you, "I love you, I died for you. I want to make you as beautiful, as much a Son of God as Myself. Let Me do it." And what have you got to do? Just to take Him into your inmost heart, to choose henceforth not to do what you would like yourself, but what Jesus would have done. To feel to your fellow-men as He felt. To believe about God what He believed about God, and in a simple, lowly, loving way, to go through this world following in His sweet footsteps, and really trying to understand what He was, and to get His Spirit and heart into you, and to make your life breathe

with His heart and His holiness. That is what Paul meant about Himself when, with a voice that had no regret in it for the lost possession of himself, but with ringing accents of triumph and glory he said : " It is no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me." God grant that that may be the story of your life and mine.

XI.

*PERENNIAL CHRISTIAN GRACES.*¹

“Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you.”—
I THESS. v. 16-18.

FIRST SUNDAY.

Read Psalm lxxv., and Revelation iv.

REJOICE EVERMORE.

MANY traits and graces of Christian character are individual and occasional. They show in some lives, not in others, and even in the same life they appear and disappear under varying circumstances. Like the diverse foliage, flower, and fruitage of the trees, that come with the seasons and go with the seasons, they belong to personal temperament and passing experience. Certain elements, on the contrary, are universal and perpetual. They form the essential core of Christian character. They are like those central fibres of a great tree that, springing from the extremities of the deepest roots, run unbroken through the whole length of the vast trunk, till they terminate in the tips of the topmost branches. Of such are the dispositions commended by the

¹ Reprinted from *Good Words*.

Apostle when he bids us rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. These are not casual ornaments or optional qualities; they are of the very warp and woof of Christianity, perpetual, ever-present, and indispensable. In the Christian life a song of glad rejoicing ever rings; a voice of prayer murmurs in pleading whispers that never sink into silence; and all along its chequered pathway a sweet breath of thanksgiving ascends unceasing to the throne of the great Father on high. Rejoicing, prayer, thanksgiving—these are the key-notes of Christian character. They are the music become audible of its inmost and essential chords—faith, hope, and charity.

It is a question of the day whether our world is a happy or a miserable world. The answer depends very much on when and where the query finds us. Who of us has not sometimes said, "The world is all wrong and wretched"? But it was when our own spirit was full of evil and unrest. There have been days when we have said, "The world is a vale of tears; there are in it more sobs than smiles." But that was because our heart was aching, and our eyes were blinded with tears. Whenever we escape from ourselves, and with unjaundiced gaze look mother-nature in the face, the world that looks back on us is a world where happiness outweighs evil and pleasure conquers pain. Were it otherwise the world could not continue. Life would become worn out, were misery, the procuress of death, stronger than happiness, the minister of life. There is, indeed, enough of decay, and pain, and strife, and death. But these are not the substance of existence. They are but the shadow of its sunlight. Spite the struggle for exist-

ence, the prevalent aspect of the world of feet and fins and feathers is one not of depression, but of alert enjoyment and vitality. And humanity's burden of centuries of toil and sorrow has not broken the spring of joy in the heart of our race, for still at its fountain-head, as it bursts eager into existence, it sparkles and bubbles with gladness in the mirth and laughter and pure joy of living, of early childhood. The world is not a vale of tears. The gladness is more than the sadness, and most of that is an accident. The face that looks at us out of nature in the song of the birds, the sweetness of the air, the glow of the sunlight, is a face of joy, and its message to us is, "Rejoice!"

The religion of Jesus is not a reversal of nature's ideal, but the fulfilment of its purpose thwarted by sin. The aim of the gospel is not to make men sad, but glad. It takes up the command of nature, repeats and re-enforces it. Religion ought to be a joy-giver, ay, a joy-heightener. Where nature said, "Rejoice!" Christianity says, "Rejoice evermore!" It takes the gladness of life, and multiplies and transfigures its radiance, like the sunlight that streams through the painted panes of a cathedral window, till its beams melt and glow and flame into gold and crimson glory. This effect of religion is not a remote and random accompaniment, but a necessary and essential attribute. The injunction of rejoicing is not a cold permission or a friendly counsel, but it is a high and peremptory command. It stands in equal rank with prayer and thanksgiving, and comes borne on the solemn tones of a voice that says, "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." It is not a thing you may choose or eschew, it is a purpose of God, a part of redemption, a heart-desire of Jesus

Christ, that your Christian life should be pervasively and persistently a life of rejoicing.

What is this spirit of rejoicing that is so imperatively demanded, that knows no break, that blooms with perennial sweetness? Since it is universal, it cannot be a thing of excited feeling or high-strung emotion, nor can it be anything incompatible with other rightful moods. It must be something that can go essentially unchanged through toil and rest, solemnity and mirth, success and failure, smiles and tears. Strong, subtle, diffusive, it is a temperament rather than a temper, a spirit more than a mood. Hard to define, it may best be understood by marking the disposition that it excludes—hopelessness, depression, despond. Under the worst burdens of sorrow, struggle, sin, the dominant note of the Christian's heart must be uncrushed buoyancy of courage, hope, and cheer. In the Bible all moods of the human spirit are ascribed to God—anger, vexation, grief, but never once despond. For that is the mood of weakness, of defeat. Thwarted God may be in the processes of His love, but not baffled in His eternal designs. Delayed He may be in the fulfilment of His purposes, but defeated never. He is God, and the end of all His ways must be rejoicing. And God is ours! In the world we may have trial, but the end of it is triumph. *Sursum corda!* We cannot be defeated. God is our portion. As combatants we suffer, but as conquerors we endure, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

Can it be that joy is the dominant mark of a religion, that has been peculiarly called the worship of sorrow, whose special benedictions are for those that mourn, and that sets over its altar a cross, and on it the image of one pouring out His soul unto

death? Is it not rather the characteristic note of that light-hearted religion of the old world, that has painted its conception of life in the joyous procession of the Hours—those lovely female forms that flit by with such eager life in their sweet faces, such strength and beauty in their rounded limbs, and something like the soaring of the lark in their starry eyes, unbent by toil, unclouded by fear, unblurred by tears? It is joy, the joy of living, but it is a joy shallow, selfish, and insufficient. It has not faced the darkness. It has fled from pain and sorrow and sin. It is a religion not of strength, but of weakness. What we men and women in this world of death and grief and wrong must have is a religion for the shadow as well as the sunlight, that with equal serenity can confront life or death, joy or sorrow. And this we have in the faith of Jesus Christ. It is indeed by pre-eminence a worship of sorrow, but of sorrow turned into joy, a religion of defeat that carries victory in its bosom. It has faced everything in life, good and evil, gain and loss, sadness and gladness. It has gone through all, and it comes again, with the scars of the conflict, and the tears of endurance on it, and with calm, triumphant glance it says, "Rejoice evermore."

How much religion needs to be lit up with joy! It is not enough to be good. We must be good attractively. Piety that is laborious, strained, despondent, is like the air when it is empty of sunshine. We want to fight the good fight of faith hopefully, light-heartedly. Is that possible with the world so perverse, with sin so strong within us, and our hearts so weak and wayward? Yes, in Christ, it is the will of God concerning you.

SECOND SUNDAY.

Read Genesis xviii. and John xvii.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING.

LIFE is for most of us a busy, bustling scene. There is so much to see and hear and do. Sight and sounds, persons and things jostle one another at the gateways of the senses. The mind is full of ideas, the heart of emotions, the hands of business. Amid the hurly-burly that is about our feet on earth, we have no time to lift our eyes to the stars and heaven. It is much if morning and evening we can make a brief pause to interject a few petitions of personal or family supplication to God. But perpetual prayer! Surely that is for the anchorite and recluse. Doubtless, if prayer be necessarily an overt act of devotion, a posture of the body, an articulate expression of desire. But what if prayer be rather an attitude of the soul, a temperament or disposition of the spirit? God is a God of reality. He cares nothing for pomps and shows and ceremonies. He regards only truth and actuality. Of phrases He makes little. He reckons with solid facts. God is a spirit. His direct contact is with our spirit. In His sight a man's prayers are not the utterances of his lips, but the active endeavours of his will; not the sentimental aspirations of his emotional hours, but the steady determinations of his heart. The requests of his mouth matter little, the bent of his life counts for everything. His real prayers are heard not in the murmur of his devotions, but in the music of the footsteps of his spirit, as these lead him on earthward or heavenward. People complain that their prayers are not heard. Their actual prayers are heard—and

answered. A mother prayed for her daughter that she might be good and love the Lord Jesus Christ, and be the child of God, and so be happy here and hereafter. But that mother in her inmost heart loved the world more than goodness, valued in her acquaintance social rank above moral worth, worshipped in very deed and truth money and title beyond purity and honour and love. Her child, living in the breath and atmosphere of her mother's heart desires, drank in her mother's real world's gospel, and so in the choosing time preferred to purchase worldly position at the price of affection and self-respect and religion. But when a loveless choice had its sequel in misery and shame, why did that mother bemoan herself that her prayers for her child's happiness had not been answered? Not answered! her prayers, her real prayers, had been only too fully answered. God gave her the desire of her heart, but He sent leanness into her soul. Our conscious prayers may be few and fitful, but our actual prayers in the bent of our character, the endeavours of our life, the secret hankerings of our souls—are unending and perpetual. In a very real and in a very awful sense we all of us “pray without ceasing.”

Is prayer efficacious? Is it any use for me to ask God to protect me from harm, to avert a menace of evil, to brighten my life with some great joy? Has not science shown us that our life is knit into a great fabric of interlocked and fast-fixed machinery, in which our lot is irrevocably determined, and where all things fall out by routine and of necessity? That is not so. If we have over our world, a loving-hearted Father, there is naught discovered yet in His works that forbids our faith in His willingness and ability to

help us. Rather has our new knowledge of the marvellous mechanism of nature strengthened the necessity we feel to postulate behind and above nature a mind of all power and wisdom. That God is and that He hears our prayers, was never a theorem of reason, but always an intuition of faith. Prayer was and is the child, not of calculation, but of heart instinct. He who insists on knowing how God may answer, has forgotten what prayer is ; while he who proposes to prove by experiment or test by statistics the fact of God's answering, has not even begun to understand what we mean by that word God. If for me it is certain that I have in heaven a God of all might, and wisdom, and goodness, a host of vexed questions become empty and irrelevant. Believing that my life is in His hands, whose will is holy, good, and perfect, what care I to inquire whether my prayer makes, or modifies, or reverses that will Divine ? What matters it to me, to tell me that I am but one of the myriad creatures, whose good shall not for any partiality be sacrificed to mine, when I feel myself in the care and keeping of a heart that is absolute love to me ? Precisely because of these ignorances, and enigmas, and awes, which some men foolishly make barriers to prayer, my prayers shall pour forth the more daringly, more abundantly, more unrestrained. With such a Father I need not fear to speak out all my heart—not merely my wise wishes, but my foolish cravings, too ; not merely my aspirations of nobility, but my cries of weakness, my shrinkings of the flesh, my pains, and agonies and tears—even as Christ in Gethsemane sought that the cup of His anguish might be taken from Him. My Father is too wise to yield to my erring importunities, but He will be gracious to

show me their error, and to wean my heart from them. He is too magnanimous to judge me harshly, but He made my surcharged heart to seek and find relief in utterance, and His love likes that I should choose His ear to tell my wayward, childish troubles and cravings to. And surely it is just this that is prayer's proper and most potent efficacy, that in this world of darkness and difficulty it brings my heart, with its mingled good and evil, into touch and fellowship with that great heart of all light, and strength, and goodness, where alone my heart can perfectly rise above the dark world, alone learn the secret of its true holiness and happiness, alone lay down the burden of its sins and sorrows, and enter into rest.

The distinctive mark of the Christian life is its possession now amid life's struggle of the joy of final triumph. That joy springs not from attainment, but from hope, and that hope rests in a faith that sees the invisible. It is much to have one's heart set to the quest of the ideal, to have the striving of our life directed to what is good and honourable. But all alone, by ourselves, how dreary the conflict, how hopeless the prospect, how heart-breaking the odds for evil ! Our little short-lived personality in such a vast lost world, against such a measureless and inveterate entail of sin, and sorrow, and shame ! We need a great Heart, lifted up high above sin and death, holy and eternal, earnest beyond our earnestness, strong where we are weak, leading us in our conflict, fighting still when we fall, linking on our fragile efforts to the firm persistence and final triumph of His everlasting goodness and truth. Such faith breathes hope in the face of defeat, kindles the smile of joy in the midst of struggle, and makes life one long, glad fellowship

with God in conflict and in victory. This is indeed to pray without ceasing.

THIRD SUNDAY.

Read Psalm cvii., and Heb. xii. 1-13.

IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS.

GRATITUDE is rare. There is in the world plenty of thanksgiving, but not much thankfulness. Acknowledgment of a debt is one thing, payment in kind quite another. The first is light, the second is laborious. The one is an activity of the lips, the other a movement of the heart. In words of thanks we are all profuse, but in the matter of heart gratitude we are mostly insolvent debtors. The default is not always due to want of heart. It is perhaps more often caused by want of thought. Few of us know how happy we are. We do not perceive how well we are off. It is the point where the shoe pinches that we think of, not the fact that we have a shoe. The profits of our business are put aside, while we worry over the losses. Our heart is bitter over the *mal-à-propos* remark of our friend; it never occurs to us to congratulate ourselves on the thousand unpleasant things he was good enough not to say. Nay, when we are grateful to our earthly friends or our Heavenly Father, is it not usually for some small external gift, while we remain unconscious of the best they do for us in making about us that ever-present, sweet environment of kindly love, that is our heart's true home amid earth's cold and empty wastes?

There are degrees in thankfulness and gradations of gratitude. The commodity that is put on the

market under these names is not all of the same quality. Much is spurious, still more raw and alloyed ; only a little quite pure and perfect. Here is a man well-to-do and prosperous, surrounded by comforts, enjoying his good things, conscious of his good fortune, happy and contented. Behold his pleased face, mark his good-humour, hear his expressions of satisfaction. Is that man not thankful? If that be all, if your description be complete, certainly not. His condition is one of selfish enjoyment, but not of gratitude. Happy he may be, thankful never. What he feels is simply his own well-being, not the thoughtful love that gave it. He is conscious only of the external bounties, but blind to the kind hand and the planning heart of the Bountiful Giver. Gratitude is an emotion possible only between two persons. Many things are mistaken for it, or make but its beginnings. Before I can truly thank God, I must feel Him really with me, and feel His love to me. A vague sense of living in a world suffused with the action of a general beneficence, and a glad experience of security and comfort in the sense, are much beyond mere self-satisfaction in one's own well-being, but these feelings still come short of genuine gratitude to God. For that we must have a touch of God more real and substantial than our contact with His gifts. For that the sweetest thing for us must be that the glow of goodness in them is the very warmth of His giving hand, and the wonder and joy of them that they came direct to us from the love of His heart Divine. Then, and only then, shall we give thanks, not with the easy tribute of the lips, but with that genuine movement of the heart in responsive gratitude and love, which is the sweetest thing man can give to man on earth, and the gift dearest to God's heart in heaven.

Thanksgiving, like joy and prayer, is to be a continuous element in the melody of a Christian heart. Our life is to be one unbroken, soaring song of grateful thanksgiving to God. That seems strange. To give thanks in our hours of gladness, when our hearts are happy, when fortune smiles on us, that is natural and easy. But when disaster shatters our hopes, and flings us out roofless into the cold world ; when the grinding wheels of toil roll monotonous over hearts that are weary unto death ; when pain, and sickness, and bereavement, or trial and temptation come like chill spectres and banish all our joy ; in our days of doubt, and grief, and strife, must we then also give thanks ? Surely that were hard ; that were unnatural. The birds sing in the sunshiny mornings. They are silent in the rain and tempest. But our hearts must give thanks alike by day and by night, in rain and in shine, not merely in the budding spring, not merely in the sweet summer when the air is all tingling with warmth and light, not merely in the golden autumn laden with fruit and corn, but also in the icy winter when the driving sleet sweeps by and the bitter frost-wind moans across the snow-locked plains ? If my path lay ever in the sunlight of prosperity, my heart might be ever chanting psalms of thanks and gladness. But in truth it passes through such contrasted regions, such changeful seasons ; now warm with trustful love, anon chilled with deep despair ; now rich in tender ties of sweet companionship, again empty, desolate, bereaved ; here entering on a grand triumphal march, and anon dragging itself wearily along, wounded and broken. That my heart should make melody of thanksgiving when the soft zephyrs of joy play over its strings I can understand ; but

shall wailing winds of sorrow, fierce blasts of woe, wild storms of calamity strike the chords and wake the same thankful music there? How should the same result emerge from causes so diverse?

When things unlike produce a like effect, we know that beneath their discordant forms they hold at heart the same common cause. Since joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity equally call forth our thanksgiving, there must reside beneath their divergent dress, behind the smiles of the one, the tears of the other, one and the same root and motive of gratitude. There need be no surprise in that. For in our successes and good fortunes, it is not the external bounty, it is not the personal pleasure, that produces our thankfulness. So far we experience no more than selfish satisfaction and enjoyment. What stirs my gratitude is the sweet sense of an unseen love going out to me and finding me in these joys. My thanksgiving is the response of my heart to God's heart. Because I believe that my Father meant and secures my good in this prosperity, I ought to and I do give thanks. So then thanksgiving ought to arise, whenever God is kind, in everything in which He seeks my well-being. Only when in anything God has not been kind, has not sought my good, has ceased to be loving, only then may my thankfulness fail and my thanksgiving cease. And we said in our haste, that thanksgiving belonged only to the days of shining summer, and not to the winter days of sorrow! Why that is as much as to say that it is only in prosperity and not at all in adversity, only in life's pleasures and not in life's pains, only in our hours of ease and not in our hours of earnestness, only in the light and selfish places of our lot and not in its grave and solemn and

grander heights, that God cares for us, seeks our welfare, is kind and good and loving. How could we ever so misjudge the great heart that made us as to dream a dark dream like that?

No wonder that gratitude is rare. What seems a spontaneous instinct is in truth one of the hardest of ethical attainments. It is a grace possible only to faith and hope, to be achieved alone by love. In life's chagrins and crosses, battles, bereavements, and losses, faith must confront not iron fate, or chance caprice, but the good and holy will of God. To fulfil life's duties faithfully, to fight its conflicts bravely, to bear its burdens loyally, our hands must be nerved and our hearts uplifted by a hope high and imperishable as heaven. To take the discipline of our life from God's hand, as it sweeps through the whole gamut of its varied music from the heights of joy to the deep notes of sorrow, to understand and gladly acquiesce in His high design to give us not pleasure but goodness, to have us not happy but holy, we need to have in us a nobility of soul and an unselfish purity of love such as are in His great heart on high. When thus in faith and hope and love our heart answers to His heart, and love on earth interprets love in heaven, then, and only then, shall we love Him as we ought, and in everything give thanks.

FOURTH SUNDAY.

Read Psalm viii., and 2 Cor. vi.

THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS CONCERNING YOU.

THE Christian life is one of perpetual rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving. It is a poem of hope and faith and love, set to a music of joy and prayer and

praise. Amid the squalor of our sinful world that makes a fair picture—the three central elements of Christian life melting into the sister graces of Christian character—hope with its smile of undying joy, faith with its fellowship of prayer unceasing, and love with its song of thanks unending. Here it stands over against our maimed lives, luring us with its unearthly loveliness, beckoning us with its holy hands, claiming us with its imperative Divineness. It is the will of God concerning you.

How have you dealt with the heavenly vision? For it comes to every one of us. Christ has lived in our lost world, has died to take away the world's sin. He has risen from the dead, He has come again into our world in His holy spirit. He lives and moves and works in a very real fashion in our world's story. Down through the centuries His heart has been moulding the thoughts of men, His spirit inspiring their aspirations, controlling their purposes, forming and fashioning their characters. He has created for us a new heaven and a new earth; He has given birth to a new humanity, Himself the head and we the members. All about us, in our modern civilisation, we encounter His thoughts, His promises, His desires, His commands. In the State as in the Church, in society as in the home, beyond all else in the sacred recesses of our inmost spirit, we meet Him with His holiness, with His pity, with His love, with His grave call to come and follow Him. From that contact with the living, redeeming, claiming Christ you cannot escape. You may say what you will to the Church, to the evidences of religion, to the records of the gospel. You may criticise them, despise them, reject them, deny them. Against the historical Son

of Man of the past you may thus speak a word of scorn, of misunderstanding, of refusal, and that may be forgiven you. But what have you to say to the Holy Spirit of Jesus, that meets you in your every-day life, that confronts you in the State, in social duties, in the secrecy of your own soul, summoning you to all goodness, purity, and truth, to the love of men and the fear of God? That contact is decisive; for if you refuse and still reject that Holy Spirit within you, it is the sin unpardonable, here and hereafter. Resisting that, you resist God direct. It is the refusal, not of an erring or confused reason, but of a wicked and evil heart. It is God in His perfect Godhead offering you a life of godliness and beauty, hated and repelled; knowing it to be God you reject, knowing it to be good you refuse. The decision has finality in it. You have rejected the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

✕What is it to be in Christ Jesus? It is a very simple and a very real thing. Thousands of men and women have realised it. It just means losing your heart to Him, so that you choose Him rather than yourself, take His will for yours, please Him rather than yourself, hate what He hates, love what He loves, and in all things strive to be what He would have you be and to do what He would have you do. You are no more your own; you have become Christ's. It is no longer you that live, but Christ living in you. That, nothing less, nothing more, is to be in Christ Jesus. ✕

Is it reasonable that a man should so give himself up to another, so abdicate his own proper self, so constitute another his lord and master? That depends on what you think of yourself and what

you think of Christ. Put your self side by side with Christ's. Is your own so fair and good and happy that you would rather keep it than have His? Even at the very best how infinitely more noble, pure, and honourable is the heart of that sinless Jesus! Where shall you reach a manhood so majestic save by sinking your own self in Him, by merging your life in His, by dying to yourself that you may live in Him? Perchance you consent so far. You are willing to be Christ's disciple in earthly things, but you hesitate to follow Him when He speaks of heavenly things. Even an unbeliever, you say, can do no better than take Christ's manhood as the measure and model of his own. But is it rational for a man to accept the God and heaven of Jesus on His bare word? What better can you do? Will your reason ever give you demonstration? Are these not things that reason can never either quite prove or disprove? And yet a man must have some heart-attitude to them. Desire or undesign? Hope or despair? Man does not live by sight alone. Where sense fails, faith must come in. And, perchance, a man's spiritual growth hangs less on his attainments of knowledge and most on his faith and hopes. If God is, He is a Spirit. Not through our senses but through our spirit we must discern Him. For that our spirits must be clean. The pure in heart see God. If I fail, what wonder, seeing how soiled and blurred the purity of my spirit is. One man has lived who had no doubt of God, who lived ever in the lap of His Father's love. He was the one stainless, sinless Son of Man. What better, what more rational thing can I do, who so much need it, than in simple faith to

take to my spirit the God and Father of Jesus Christ, and to my heart His guarantee of life everlasting? Thus in Christ I am conqueror of sin and sorrow; I possess God and immortality; all things are mine in time and in eternity, for I am Christ's and Christ is God's. In Christ I can rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. It is the will of God concerning me. His will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

XII.

FORGIVENESS AND FEAR.

“Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice : let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications [entreaties]. If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities [or visit sins with absolute retribution], O Lord, who shall stand [who would there be left existing]? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning : I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord : for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall deliver Israel from all his iniquities.”—PSA. cxxx.

I WANT, as rapidly as I can, to help you to picture to yourselves the mood that begat that passionate poem of prayer and repentance and hope. It comes from the heart of a man who had such a history as, very likely, some of us have had. Away back in the past there came to him a message from God that told him how he came from the Father's hands up in heaven, and how the heart of God made goodness and holiness, and there came to him from heaven a dream of a noble, happy, honourable life ; but he yielded to temptation, and entangled himself in the slavery of passion and of sin, and he spoiled the inner peace of his heart. He entrapped himself into degrading habits, and ruined even the external prosperity of his life, and at last he lies there helpless,

a shipwrecked, ruined man, the brightness of his life's dawn extinguished, and out of the depths of the blackness and storm he cries unto God. The verse makes the picture of a drowning man: a man utterly ruined and overwhelmed, but in his shame, in his degradation, he is not quite fallen, he is not reconciled to have missed the bright dream of those bygone days. He remembers that heavenly vision; he knows he was meant for better things. The heart in him still clings to that call of God, and that lofty destiny that was before him. Out of his intense shame he longs to find another way to get back to goodness and God. And then there comes to him that terrible discovery that he is utterly impotent to deliver himself. The only hope for him is that God would intervene and do something on his behalf.

This is a question that has been real to some of you: Does God give a foolish, disobedient, sinful, ruined man another chance?

Now a human heart in such extremity, in such misery and degradation, with such a great yearning, with such a passionate longing for God and goodness, lifts up its eyes to heaven and searches for anything that would give it hope. There is so much of threatening within one's own breast: there is the stern voice of conscience condemning the sin; there is the foul, poisoned breath of corruption, of sin itself, that makes it hardly possible for a man to believe that he ever can be clean again; and there is the devil backing up that lie and bidding him despair. Has God any pity, any real compassion, for sinful, broken, ruined men? or, is God simply a righteous, just, stern judge? If that be what God is

away up there in heaven, then there is no hope for sinners here on earth.

The poet who wrote this psalm looked round in his misery, in his despair, on our world, and suddenly he saw a great fact. He saw that that awful, almighty God does not put an end to sin; that though this world has gone astray—though all mankind is tainted with pollution and corruption, insulting and disobeying God—still the world goes on, men are not destroyed, ruined, put out of existence. God is very patient with them; justice is not executed. If God were to do that there would not be a man left living. What is the meaning of that? why it means that God is not tired of men. He has not repented of the world He has made; He does not despair of men yet. If God is continuing the race of mankind, it must be because He means to help them out of their loss, out of their sin. There must be in God forgiveness. Ah! then suddenly he sees why there should be forgiveness in God. The very glory, the honour, the dignity of God would suggest to Him not to foreclose for the present the human race, but to lead it on through what seemed defeat, out of the depths, back to heaven and to holiness. There is forbearance, deliverance, compassion, help, pardon with God to sinful men in order that God may reap the love, the gratitude, the thanksgiving, the revering, adoring awe and worship of His creatures.

Then in one word let me trace the thought that runs through the rest of the psalm, because I want to linger on this, the centre jewel that is set in that ring of gold. With that thought in his heart, there comes to the poet expectant, joyful anticipation of his release from sin and such an impetus, too, to fight the battle

against temptation as he never had had before. With such a God on his side, with such a help within him, his heart is enlarged, and with that largeness of heart that comes from the possession of such a God, he thinks of a wider victory, and his soul goes out to the other men and women of God's world that are fighting the same battle—to all poor souls struggling against sin, reaching out despairing hands to God; and lifting his eyes to heaven he sees there a gleam of hope for every one of them, and hopes and trusts, for in his God there is redemption, plenteous forgiveness, and hope for His people.

Now I go back to what I have called the kernel, the centre, the glory of the psalm. "But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." What I am going to talk about is the singular connection of forgiveness and fear. If the psalm had said, "There is forgiveness with God that men's hearts may pour out at His footstool their gratitude," we could understand that. If it had said, "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be loved," that, too, we could understand; but it does jar a little, and startle us, and puzzle us to have it said that the supreme, ultimate result and outcoming of God's forgiving our sins is to create within our hearts "fear" of God. What is the meaning of that? Fear is a word which, like love, covers a great many different meanings, and is used to describe things the most diverse. There is cringing, coward fear—dread; *that* cannot be meant. There is terror that puts the man at a distance; *that* cannot be meant. But there is fear, the feeling of revering awe, of worshipful adoration; a conscious sense of knowing some one infinitely grander, nobler, more pitiful and

awful in justice, mercy, purity, might, in heaven high above you and me, yet craving for us, and we belonging to that Being. That is the fear of God; revering awe and love. Now how is that the result of a Divine forgiveness? Well, first of all mark this, that nothing but forgiveness in God could beget such a feeling in our human heart. A God that had no forgiveness in Him—a God that was merely an iron, relentless judge and punisher of sin, what feeling would He beget in our hearts? Why in the very hour when we were sorry for our sins, when we craved again to be clean and holy, when our hearts went out with regret that we had disobeyed and offended a holy God, if He appeared before us simply as the just but the merciless judge, what would be the effect upon a poor, penitent, relenting heart? Why, to turn its penitence into hatred, and rage, and indignation. A God without forgiveness would be a God to be hated. Such a God would be a fiend. A God that was careless about sin, that was not offended by impurity, that did not resent cruelty and injustice, that did not loathe and abhor filthiness, and lying, and uncleanness—a God who was undisturbed and untroubled by the extent of the evil in His world, who let it alone simply out of laxity—could you fear such a God? No! you would despise Him. A God that reckons with men (a God such as the self-righteous man makes for himself), a God that will not remit the price of your penalties, a God whom you have to obey and make up to by a certain amount of good works—what would you feel to Him? Love? Revering awe? Never. You would feel yourself equal with Him.

Ah! the very rationalism of the rationalist should

make him hold fast to the old gospel story of Divine redemption and Divine forgiveness by a Father up in heaven to His children here on earth, through His one sinless, stainless, holy, atoning Son, because in such a relation of God to men, and in such a relation alone of free and full forgiveness is it possible for a heart to rise to the full glory and grandeur of humanity in love, and fear, and worship, with adoring wonder and gratitude, and tenderness, towards a God that forgives.

But still I think we do not fathom the full depth and significance there is in the link by which our psalm connects Divine forgiveness and human fear of God. What we want to discover is the element or ingredient in forgiveness that ought to be in our hearts to form the gratitude and love in the element of revering fear.

Now we must remember what forgiveness is before we can understand that. There are so many things that go to make real forgiveness. First of all, forgiveness is only possible between two persons. You do not forgive the sea water for sinking your ship. You do not forgive the piece of machinery that crushes your hand. The animal that wounds you, you do not forgive it. You cannot. Before you have forgiveness in its full import there must be between the forgiver and the forgiven a special relationship.

You do not talk of forgiving a stranger who harms you accidentally. You use language that implies it, but it is not real ; there is no such emotion as that which is justly called forgiveness. You overlook the offence, you excuse him, but it is hardly forgiveness.

Ah ! you may remember the time when some one that you had done a great deal for, some one you

loved most tenderly, and who, you thought, loved you in return, did you a cruel and shameful wrong. You remember it was not the hurt to you as when the machine bruised your hand, or the wild beast tore you with its teeth, or the stranger damaged your property. Ah! you remember how much more intense was the hate and resentment. But when pity and compassion awoke in you and your heart grew tender again, do you not remember the tenderness, the melting emotion of reconciliation? That was forgiveness. When we talk of God forgiving you and me, sinners, oh, friends, we are using an empty word, or else we mean that in the great heart of God there is just such an emotion as that—nay, grander, and richer, and sweeter, and nobler than the finest earthly forgiveness.

But that is not all. We often talk of forgiveness when the damage done to us is so slight that it costs one almost nothing to put away resentment. Moreover, we speak of forgiveness in many cases where we have no right to use the word at all. There is so much abstinence from resentment and retaliation caused by—well, sheer commercial interests. Often you take an injury from a man, and overlook it not with a noble motive, but because you get too much profit out of him to quarrel with him. That is not forgiveness. And often a man does not resent an insult because he is so thick-skinned he does not feel it. Then there are all the social restraints and forms and courtesies of life. It is no good talking of forgiveness in such cases.

Before you can have forgiveness in its perfection you must have first love between the forgiver and the forgiven, and then, in him who forgives, you

must have an intense, quick, sensitive feeling of injury, real suffering and pain at the wrong. You must have, too, a deeply developed sense of justice, and hostility to sin, and of resentment against wrong. Ay, beyond that you must have in the forgiver a grand resolve to not merely release the offender from the penalty of what wrong he has done, but a yearning to make him good again to release him from sin itself. Last of all supreme forgiveness means that he who forgives, in doing it has to suffer himself. Forgiveness in its perfection is the triumph of self-sacrifice.

Had I time (out of the well-known stories of the world that illustrate the magnificence of forgiveness) I could give you illustrations that would make it infinitely present to you. Now what about God? God forgives sinners. That means, first of all, that God cares for you and me with a real affection. It means that God wants us good and pure and holy. It means that God is grieved when we sin. It means that God not merely remits future penalties that will fall upon us, but stirs Himself to make us clean and pure and holy again. It means that God will take trouble and pains to do that. Now think of the great grand God that rules the universe feeling to you and me like that! Oh, when we realise that, what is the feeling that comes into our heart? Ay, more than that, it means that that God is holy, that that God joys and delights in holiness, and that He loves holiness for itself. Mark you, if it were merely a sort of selfish, refined dislike to the presence of impurity, then God's simplest action would be to annihilate sin and blot it out of existence.

If God were merely selfish in the sense of holiness,

I say He would drive us away from His presence, He would banish us out of existence. If God preserves us to go on sinning, paining, insulting, offending His holiness by our polluted existence, it means that God loves holiness for its own fair sake, that God will long endure the existence of sin in order that He may make us pure and holy again. Ah ! that gives one a tremendous conception of what God's holiness means in His heart—the intensity of that purity, that horror and hatred of sin by God. Now what further does it mean? It means that in order to make us sinless again, that purity, that sinless holiness of God is going to come into touch and contact with our actual evil shame and sinfulness, for how else will you ever cleanse a human spirit from its depravity and degradation from the presence of that tremendous grasp and force of habitual sin? You must come into conflict with it. How? With the elements of the physical world? No, moral force is mightier than physical. You cannot cleanse it by all the waters of the ocean, by all the solutions of chemistry, by air, by fire, by electricity, by anything on earth that God has made. You must, if you are to roll back the tide of sin, if you are to remove its uncleanness, its foul pollution, you must bring into that soiled soul the stainless, sinless holiness; and where will you get that from? From fellow-men fallen like yourself? No. It must come out of the heart of God. It must be the Spirit of God in all its sinlessness, in all its horror and recoil from sin descending to enter into our very being, and to pass through all the fibres and cords of our spirit, and in fierce conflict with sin to blot it out and make us clean. That is the story of

redemption from the very beginning, God's Spirit wrestling in men, and it reached its consummation, its perfection, and complete triumph when the holy, loving God dwelt among men—their brother bound to them by the absolute unity of a common humanity, and by His life, His death, made atonement for sin, and through His Spirit that breathes and moves in every relenting and every penitent heart, and every aspiration of goodness in every Christian man and woman is still waging that long warfare to banish sin from humanity. Now look what that means for God's holiness, sensitive, spotless, pure, loathing sin. The purest human heart shrinks back with horror from vile pollution or the cruelty of a grown man to a little child ; but this holiness of God to all sin feels a keener horror, a shrinking far more intense than that.

This holiness of God comes into actual touch and contact with our sin, and loving us feels the horror, the shame, the pain, the punishment of that sin—as the mother feels it in her prodigal son but infinitely more.

Oh, look what it means for God so to forgive men and release them from sin—it is for God to suffer the punishment of sin. . . . It reached its complete climax and triumph when Christ on the cross died, bearing the horror, pain, shame, and punishment of our world, through His love for us that bound Him to us, and that made our sin like the fire of hell to His holy heart.

Ah ! if we could but see it, if we could but gaze on that heart of God, the radiance of such holiness, the beauty of such infinite pity and compassion. If I could but make it real and visible, and felt to your

heart that such a God has so forgiven our sins ! Is it gratitude ? Is it love ? Is it not an overpowering, awful consciousness of the immeasurable moral superiority and majesty and grandeur of that God that bows you down upon your knees with love hushed into worship, and with gratitude swelled into an unutterable revering fear ? And then the effect of that conception, of that realisation of Divine forgiveness in you and me will be an inspiration from heaven itself, a stimulus irresistible, a new ardour in the battle against our own sin. If God be so passionately, so intensely in earnest to conquer the evil in me and to have me clean and holy, how dare I be languid, or careless, or indifferent ! Oh, how we men and women, so pressed with the cares of the world and the burdens of business, dragged down by the dulness and deadness of our own hearts, need, when at that communion-table we come face to face with God forgiving us, to have our hearts filled with gratitude, and love, and purpose of new obedience, so that more than they that wait for the morning our spirit waits and watches and works with God for our complete redemption. May God bless you all. Amen.

XIII.

THE VEILED GLORY OF GOD.

EXODUS xxxiii.

THIS narrative is intensely striking. It arrests attention because its statements and its pictures are so startling and also suggestive. It makes a picture of God in relation with men that contains in it some notes that strike on our ear at first like discords, and no doubt you know that this is one of the chapters that infidels are fond of making a mock at. No doubt it is a strange narrative. Look what it contains on the surface. The Israelites have sinned a great sin against God. While Moses is with the Lord on the mount, receiving the law, the people have made themselves a golden calf and worshipped it, and have prostrated themselves in its honour. But now they have repented of that sin; they have sought to make their peace with God, and God has promulgated to them His full and free pardon. Yet what do you find God doing? Announcing that though He has forgiven them He will go henceforth at a greater distance from them. He will no more lead them, going in their midst with His own personal presence and power. He will send an angel instead. Does not that look as

though God forgives sins but does not forget them ; harbours in His breast some lingering shred of personal vindictiveness against those who have wronged Him. But still stranger is this : Moses and the people, heart-broken, abandoned, cover themselves with sackcloth, and indulge in mourning and prayer, pleading with God to change His mind, and God changes His mind, and after refusing to go among them, consents once more to be their Leader, and personally to dwell in their midst. Is God, then, changeable ?

After that you have Moses urging a personal petition to God. He begs God to show him His glory, to allow him once to look right into His face. And God tells him that he may not see His face, for the sight of God's face would be the destruction of life ; but God will put him into the way, will cover His eyes with His hand, will pass by in glorious procession, showing His majesty and His glory, and when that spectacle is past, then He will take his hand away and allow Moses to behold His back, but His face he may not see. What a materialistic conception of God ! What does it mean ? Is it grotesque ? Is it a picture of God unworthy of the Bible ? If so, how then has it got a place in that majestic story of God's dealings with Israel, which fills the bulk of those early books of the Bible, that contain in them pictures of a God, solitary and single, the one only grand, transcendent, holy, righteous God, the Judge of all the world.

We must not take the story in its bare prosaic literalness. There is poetry in it. It is an object lesson. It is pictorial, imaginative, physically imaginative ; a picture made for childlike minds of

God's actual dealings with men in the past, and therefore God's treatment in the present.

Now suppose we use our imagination in the reading of the story, and, best of all, suppose we take our own personal experience of God's dealings with us and with those that we have known, and see whether we cannot find in our experience some such truths, grand and spiritual, as are here expressed in the startling pictures and images of the narrative.

Now, first of all, what of the suggestion that when God forgives a sin He remains further off from the sin? Is there anything in our experience, in the histories of men and women, that have lived near our own time like that? I venture, with a great deal of confidence to believe that there are men and women sitting in this church who have had such an experience as I am going to describe, and those of you who have not, can fancy it at least. A man brought up in a Christian home, with a pure and innocent and religious childhood, having come in contact with that gross infidelity that tears the Bible in shreds and triumphs over it, or with the lures and temptations of passion and vice forgets God; or he has stained the purity of his life, of his affection, of his conscience with the baseness of things forbidden, and after he has gone many a day or year on that prodigal path, the memory of his old home—of father and mother—comes to him. He breaks down, tears of penitence flow from his eyes. He longs to get back to the old people, the old love of God, the old faith, back to the old cleanness, and purity, and virtue. He goes on his knees and tells God his penitence and his longing, and there comes to him an assurance right and true

that God forgives any sinner, however dark, and bad, and base, the moment he turns from his sin and consents to be friends with God again. Yes, the man is forgiven, but that forgiveness does not undo the consequence of his sin. He cannot get back at once to the old, inner, dear, sweet intimacy with his God. Your doubter, your unbeliever, your converted infidel, oh, what would he not give if he could be a little child again kneeling by a mother's side, when he comes to lie down on his deathbed, with the spectres of the doubts that he had welcomed in his breast haunting him? And the prodigal, what would he not give if he could get back to the old innocence again? Ah! no, God is in one way further off from the penitent, and in another way nearer; further off in the breach which sin has made between him and God's holiness and fearful majesty, but infinitely nearer in another way, in the depth of God's pity, and compassion, and determination to love him in a way he did not need when he was an innocent child.

Is not the suggestion of the story true that the effect of sin is to force God further away? A man has to delay, to struggle, to pray many a day, many a year sometimes before he gets quite back again.

Moses, heart-broken because God will not come among them again, turns to the people and tells them of this last misfortune that has befallen them, and the people have heard enough to understand it, they comprehend the enormity of their sin.

Moses, up to this point—if you have read the previous chapters you will see—had passed through a period of tremendous strain and trial to his bodily nerve, to his courage, to his tenacity of heart affec-

tion, to his faith in God, and he has come through it without flinching. See him now that God is once more to be what He was before. All the strength gone out, timid, trembling, his faith shaken with doubt, turning to God and crying, "O God, I cannot go on; I cannot carry out Thy work, I cannot be a leader of this people unless Thou wilt give me a boon; unless Thou wilt vouchsafe to me a revelation of Thyself beyond all I have ever got yet, that shall make me know that the end of all the struggle will be triumph and not miserable defeat. Lift up my heart with exultant faith, show me Thy glory that is to be written in the world's story through this people's history and career. O God, let me look into Thy face and read it all there."

You can understand the passionate craving in Moses' heart to see the future as he saw the present. He saw the things of earth with their earthliness, but the heavenly things have all to be taken in by faith. He had a vision before him of his people's past failures, of their ingratitude, of their cowardliness. He could see before him that land towards which they marched, with its rugged mountains, with its cities, fortresses, giant warriors, its soldiers, and its great armies; and how could he believe that in the end they would be successful?

Cannot you comprehend how his soul longed to set against that panorama of despair and doubt another long roll of pictures? If only God would reveal to him the march plainly across that wilderness; if only God would show the tottering, falling walls of Jericho; if only God would reveal to him their enemies routed and themselves settled in that land of promise and His kingdom established, built amongst

them. "O God, show me Thy glory away in the future."

You and I can understand that. The other night some of you sat down and looked away into the new year, and cried to God if only you could see what the next few months will bring to your business, to your home, to your son, your daughter; and you young people here with life before you, with some new tie to be formed or to be refused, oh, with what eager longing you cry to God to draw the curtain aside to enable you to decide whether to enter that partnership, to start that new undertaking, to form that new friendship. Oh, that your eyes could travel along the coming years, and you could see whether they were to end in prosperity or disaster.

Moses' longing was denied by God, and your longing is denied too. You cannot see the future. It is not yet done; and yet if God chose He could show you and me all that is to be. The future does not exist in earthly history. It is not yet moulded into deeds and achievements, reverses, victories on our earth's surface; but there is a place where the future could be read in every line, in every tint and shade and hue of it. The future! Who is making the future? Oh, unless there is no God at all, the future is the will of God, and the will of God is written in the face of God—looks out of God's eyes. You remember how Christ's face was bent to go up to Jerusalem to His death, and the disciples read that resolve in His face and fell behind Him with awed hearts, not quite comprehending, shrinking back from His high resolve. Oh, think of God's face like that. God's face is the future.

"O God, show me Thy face." If you and I

could look with bodily eyes into that face of God we should know then—not by faith, but by sight—what God's future shall be.

We cannot see God's face, and why? To see His face were death. Death? How? Let me rapidly—for my time is nearly exhausted—just sketch to you the line of thought that reveals the deep meaning there is in that pictorial expression of our story. To see God's face would be death. To a man who had once looked into the face of God, earth would be nothing but a blur to him, after that blaze of light and love in God's face. He would walk through life like the Lazarus of Robert Browning's poem, oblivious of earthly measurements of things, his soul possessed by the "undreamed-of rapture" which had put "the cheap old joy in the scorned dust." How often, when a youth is born to a golden career of ready-made fortune, is the present destroyed by that revelation of the future. He will not work, he will not study, he will do nothing.

Some of you remember the time when you received a new, a sudden elevation. How impossible it was for you to keep up the old relations, to attend to the old duties!

The disclosure of the future prematurely is the destruction of the present. If the day of your death were announced to you, would it be a boon? If disaster came to you in your business, would it be well for you to know it was coming? When your heart misgives you as to the future, look back to patriarch, to prophet, to martyr, to the saints, to your own beloved fathers and mothers, to all the white-robed band which has gone before; look back to the story of the gentle, Divine, loving Jesus; turn right round

to look at the past and you can read the future there.

It is good for us that we cannot see the future. You and I, in our ignorance, want to walk by sight, and God won't let us walk by sight, and instead of showing Moses the battlefields, the victories, the triumphs, God showed him Himself, not Himself that is to be, but He showed him what His heart had been in the past. Ah! it was grander, better, to look at God in that way.

It would be a degradation to our spiritual life, if we could, to walk by sight instead of faith. It would be as if your son could not have his heart at rest and be free from care unless you showed him the banker's receipt for the money that you had deposited in the bank to provide for him until he had grown up and could support himself.

Oh, I think that sometimes even the noblest doctrines of our faith are taught in a way that leaves too little room for faith. That grand doctrine of the atonement is preached sometimes in that way. As if you and I were going to demand the legal processes clear and distinct on paper, and to believe that we are to be saved by them. All you and I want is to see the great heart of God who gave His Son to die for us. God can take care of the legal processes for us Himself.

All that I want to know is that it is God's doing, undeserved by me, done for me that I may love Him. Just as a father likes his little boy to come to him in his trouble or in his fear, and to have confidence in him.

I know no better way to make it real and plain to you than just to remind you of a legend of the Middle

Ages:—There was a little child on earth that loved God, and every night poured out its tiny prayer to the great Spirit, and, the story says, God loved to hear the little child's timid, trembling, pitiful prayer. The child died and went away to heaven, and instead of its prayer, with its doubt and fear, God's ear caught the song of praise of a new angel up in heaven that had no fear, no doubt in it, nothing but ringing triumph, gladness, and joy. God loved to hear the angel's song, but He missed his little creature's timid, trembling prayer.

Oh, what a home-like, father-like God! How easy to love Him—to love Him like a little child. And that is the God revealed to us in that grand Old Testament story.

27, PATERNOSTER ROW,
LONDON.

HODDER & STOUGHTON'S

NEW AND RECENT WORKS.

THE CHURCH IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE, A.D. 64—100.

By PROFESSOR A. M. RAMSAY, M.A.

With Maps and Illustrations. 8vo, cloth.

The work is in the main a revision and enlargement of a course of lectures delivered in Mansfield College, Oxford, early in the year, and it is published at the urgent advice of several high authorities who listened to the lectures.

Its purpose is to trace the history of the relations which the Roman Imperial Government maintained towards the growing power of the Christian Church, and to describe the situation of Christian history within the general history of the Roman Empire before A.D. 180.

Throughout the work the attempt is made to utilise, for the elucidation of Christian history, the materials collected by the writer and many able and learned coadjutors in twelve years of exploration, and published in part in a very brief form in his work on the Historical Geography of Asia Minor.

CHRIST IN MODERN THEOLOGY.

By A. M. FAIRBAIRN, D.D., Principal of Mansfield College,
Author of "Studies in the Life of Christ," &c.

8vo, cloth.

This book is an attempt to determine the significance for constructive theology of the new emphasis laid on the historical Person and Teaching of Christ. It falls into two parts or books. The first is historical and critical, taken up with the factors and course of development in theology from the primitive Church to our own day, and with the inquiries and discussions which in our century have resulted in our increased knowledge of the mind of Christ. The second is theological and constructive, and discusses, from the standpoint of the New Testament interpretation of Christ, the fundamental ideas of Christian Theology. Its purpose is to exhibit God as interpreted by Christ as the determinative principle or idea in Theology, in the Church, and in the Scriptures.

CHARACTERISTICS AND CHARACTERS OF WILLIAM LAW.

Selected and Arranged with an Introduction by ALEXANDER
WHYTE, D.D., St. George's Free Church, Edinburgh.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 7s. 6d.

"A volume of passages selected from his nine works. Those who have not had occasion to read Law have no idea of his depth and power and fruitfulness."—DR. WHYTE.

"Of how great service William Law's works have been in reviving or establishing true, rational, scriptural religion, cannot be fully known till the author of that religion shall descend in the clouds of heaven."
—JOHN WESLEY.

"William Law believed all that he professed, and practised all that he enjoined."—GIBBON.

CHRIST THE MORNING STAR, AND OTHER SERMONS.

By JOHN CAIRNS, D.D., LL.D., Principal of the United Presbyterian College, Edinburgh. Edited by HIS BROTHERS.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 6s.

"During the last two or three months of his life Dr. Cairns had made considerable progress in preparing materials for a volume of sermons. He had re-written twelve discourses, and had selected as many more, obviously to be treated in a similar manner, when his sudden death interrupted him in the midst of his labours, the pen almost literally falling from his hand, as on the day preceding his death he had been engaged in writing the sermon on 'Christ, the Sun of Righteousness,' and left it partly unfinished."—FROM THE PREFACE.

THE DIVINE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE.

By ADOLPH SAPHIR, D.D.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 6s.

"These lectures are, in some respects, the most important of all his writings, as they give, in a connected series, his matured views of the relations of the two great divisions of the Bible. No preacher or writer of our day had such a clear insight into the spirit, if we may so speak, of the sacred writings. This was the great charm of his preaching, which made it so attractive to many earnest-minded Christians of all churches. It was full of instruction, because it brought out the deep meaning, quite apparent when indicated—for his interpretations were not fanciful, but real—of the symbols and prophecies of the Old Testament, as well as of the narratives and sayings of the New. The unity of teaching in both he most clearly and strikingly illustrated."—FROM THE PREFACE.

PRESENTATION EDITION.

SONGS OF REST.

Edited by W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

Elegantly bound in buckram, gilt top, 5s.

This volume includes the first and second series which have been so favourably received. They have been thoroughly revised, and increased by one-third, and the work in its complete form will make a choice gift-book.

THIRTY YEARS AMONG SOUTH SEA CANNIBALS.

THE STORY OF JOHN G. PATON TOLD FOR YOUNG FOLKS.

By the REV. JAMES PATON, B.A.

With Map and 45 Full-page Illustrations by JAMES FINNEMORE.

8vo, cloth, gilt edges, 5s.

"Ever since the story of my brother's life first appeared it has been constantly pressed upon me that a **Young Folks' Edition** would be highly prized. The Autobiography has therefore been re-cast and illustrated, in the hope and prayer that the Lord will use it to inspire the boys and girls of Christendom with a whole-hearted enthusiasm for the conversion of the Heathen World to Jesus Christ. A few fresh incidents have been introduced; the whole contents have been rearranged to suit a new class of readers; and the service of a gifted artist has been employed to make the book every way attractive."—FROM THE PREFACE.

THE FOUR MEN.

By the REV. JAMES STALKER, M.A., D.D., Author of
"Imago Christi."

Crown 8vo, cloth, 2s. 6d.

With Chapters on

**Temptation—Conscience—The Religion for To-Day—Christ
and the Wants of Humanity—Public Spirit—The Evi-
dences of Religion—Youth and Age.**

"When I was in America last year, delivering the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching in Yale University, the first of these discourses was given at the academic service in the University Chapel on Sunday morning, April 12th, 1891. Mr. D. L. Moody, the evangelist, who chanced to be present, insisted on having it printed, and he sent copies, I believe, to all the students of the University. In the same irresistible way he got the addresses on *Temptation* and *Conscience* published. As these addresses are in circulation in America, I have thought that they may be useful and acceptable in this country also."—FROM THE PREFACE.

SIXTH SERIES—1892 3.

THE
EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE.

Edited by the REV. W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.,
Editor of "The Expositor."

SIX VOLUMES. In large crown 8vo, cloth.

PRICE TO SUBSCRIBERS IN ADVANCE, 24s.

SEPARATE VOLS. 7s. 6d. EACH.

* * The following volumes will be issued, if practicable, within one year, commencing December 30th. Should it not be possible to include all the volumes named, they will be replaced by others from the list already announced.

I.

PRINCIPAL RAINY, D.D.

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

By the REV. PRINCIPAL RAINY, D.D.

II.

ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D.

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

By the VENERABLE F. W. FARRAR, D.D., Archdeacon of
Westminster.

III.

PROF. BLAIKIE, D.D.

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

By the REV. PROFESSOR W. G. BLAIKIE, D.D., LL.D.

IV.

DR. ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS. VOL. II.

By the REV. ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

V.

PROFESSOR J. M. FULLER.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

By the REV. PROFESSOR J. M. FULLER, M.A.

VI.

PROFESSOR ADENEY.

EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER.

By the REV. PROFESSOR W. F. ADENEY, M.A.

The Devotional Library.

Handsomely printed and bound, 3s. 6d. each.

I.

MEMORANDA SACRA.

By PROFESSOR J. RENDEL HARRIS.

[Nearly ready.]

II.

THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD.

By SIR RICHARD HILL.

[Shortly.]

III.

THE KEY OF THE GRAVE.

By W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

* * Other volumes in preparation.

[Shortly.]

THE PILLAR IN THE NIGHT.

By J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.,

Author of "Morning and Night Watches," &c.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d.

[Nearly ready.]

QUEST AND VISION.

By W. J. DAWSON,

Author of "The Makers of Modern English," &c.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d.

[In a few days.]

CONTENTS : Shelley—Wordsworth and his Message—Religious Doubt and Modern Poetry—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—George Eliot—George Meredith—The New Realism : Olive Schreiner, Mark Rutherford, Rudyard Kipling, and J. M. Barrie—The Poetry of Despair.

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST,

and other Discourses Delivered on Special Occasions.

By R. W. DALE, LL.D., of Birmingham.

Third Thousand. Crown 8vo, cloth, 6s.

"These are certainly among the most massive, and, as a consequence, most impressive sermons of the day. Each is a sort of miniature theological treatise, but the theology is alive—as it were, heated through and through by the fires of a mighty conviction which has become a passion to convince. . . . In these sermons there is a fine universalism; they might be addressed to any audience—academic, professional, commercial, artisan. And to hear them would be to feel that religion is a thing to be believed and obeyed."—*Speaker*.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE LIVING CHRIST AND THE FOUR GOSPELS.

Sixth Thousand. Crown 8vo, cloth, 6s.

"Dr. Dale's lectures are truly admirable."—*Literary Churchman*.

"He proceeds to restate the evidence for historical Christianity, and does it with the lucidity and skill of arrangement which we expect to find in his work. In less than two hundred pages he puts the whole argument as clearly and as cogently as needs be. Persons who are distressed by destructive criticism cannot do better than fortify themselves by reading the synopsis of the evidence on the side of belief."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

DR. MACLAREN'S BIBLE TEXT-BOOKS.

A New and most Important Series of Works Specially Designed for Sunday Schools and Bible Classes.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d. each.

BIBLE CLASS EXPOSITIONS.

By ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D.

The Gospel of St. Matthew, Vols. I. and II.

The Gospel of St. Luke, Vol. III.

"Dr. Maclaren's great strength lies in dealing with the thought presented and the characters depicted in the sacred page. These he seizes by a happy intuition, and sets forth in a simple, interesting, and elegant manner. He does not supply the teacher with many facts. Hundreds of Doctors Dryasdust can do that, but he does something better and rarer. He furnishes him with thoughts, and gives him that kind of inspiration without which, however informatory, the work of both teacher and preacher will be poorly done."—*Scotsman*.

TO MY YOUNGER BRETHREN :

Chapters on Pastoral Life and Work.

By the REV. HANDLEY C. G. MOULE, M.A., Principal
of Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

"Practical, sensible, and devout."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"This is a valuable work, thoughtful and practical in a high degree."
—*Christian*.

"We can cordially recommend his work to the younger clergy as the work of one who, from the nature of his position, has had unusual opportunities of observing their needs, their weaknesses, and their difficulties, and who brings to bear upon his observations a spirit of piety and earnestness and a keen good sense which makes them worthy of the closest attention."—*Church Quarterly Review*.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

I.

LIFE IN CHRIST AND FOR CHRIST.

Twelfth Thousand. 32mo, cloth, red edges, 1s.

II.

VENI CREATOR:

Thoughts on the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit of
Promise.

Fifth Thousand. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

"Whatever the Principal of Ridley Hall writes is worth reading. There is in it always a spirit of devotion and practical religion which tends to communicate itself to his readers with a blessed contagion. He has the power to bring intense devotional piety into the common concerns of life; he helps us to see how to bring the supernatural into intimate relations with the natural."—*Guardian*.

SOCIAL AND PRESENT-DAY QUESTIONS.

By the VEN. ARCHDEACON FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S.

Second Edition. 8vo, cloth, 7s. 6d.

"Thoughtful, suggestive, and edifying."—*Times*.

"To anything that Dr. Farrar has to say thousands listen with unbroken attention; and while he speaks with the authority that attaches to a life distinguished by lofty aims and acknowledged usefulness, he always expresses his thoughts in language of extreme beauty, clearness, and strength. It is sufficient to say that here is a volume rich in excellent matter, written in the best of English, into which a reader may dip at any place and at any time, with profit and pleasure."—*Scotsman*.

THE PRÉACHER AND HIS MODELS.

The Yale Lectures on Preaching, 1891.

By the REV. JAMES STALKER, D.D., Author of "The Life of Jesus Christ," "The Life of St. Paul," &c.

Sixth Thousand. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

"No living preacher knows better how to build a sermon than Dr. Stalker. A book on the art of which he is so skilled a master cannot fail to be read with the widest interest. . . . His analyses are full of subtle insight and clear thinking, admirably illustrated and perfectly expressed."—*Modern Church*.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

IMAGO CHRISTI:

The Example of Jesus Christ.

Twentieth Thousand. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

"An immortal book."—*Mr. Spurgeon*.

"The execution is full of ingenuity, and the book can be recommended as a devout and thoughtful commentary on practical Christian life in many phases. Mr. Stalker has broad sympathies and a watchful eye, and speaks in a tone that will commend itself to all his readers."—*Saturday Review*.

Presentation Edition, bound in padded leather, 7s. 6d. net.

WORKS BY PROF. HENRY DRUMMOND, F.R.S.E., F.G.S

I.

TROPICAL AFRICA.

Twenty-seventh Thousand. With Map and Illustrations, 3s. 6d.

"A charmingly written book."—*Saturday Review*.

"Professor Drummond is here at his very best. The article on mimicry especially is worthy to rank with anything ever written by Wallace, Bates, or Darwin himself on this fascinating subject."—*Academy*.

II.

NATURAL LAW IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.

Twenty-ninth Edition, completing One Hundred and Ninth Thousand. Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d.

"One of the most impressive and suggestive books on religion that we have read for a long time."—*Spectator*.

"We have no hesitation in saying that this is one of the most able and interesting books on the relations which exist between natural science and spiritual life that has appeared."—*Literary Churchman*.



